

FORGET *Foucault* 2.0 *

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Prelude

“There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.”

“But, then, what is philosophy today –philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?”

“As to those for whom to work hard, to begin and begin again, to attempt and be mistaken, to go back and rework everything from top to bottom, and still find reason to hesitate from one step to the next –as to those, in short, for whom work in the midst of uncertainty and apprehension is tantamount to failure, all I can say is that clearly we are not from the same planet.” (Excerpts from Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. II: *The Use of Pleasure*, 1984, pp. 8, 8-9, 7).

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1. Introduction

In a new book titled, interestingly enough, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (2006), Eric Paras takes up a question that has preoccupied many contemporary readers, sympathizers and critics alike, and that has been the cause of much spilled ink in the past two decades or so. “How and why does Foucault go from being a philosopher of the disappearance of the subject to one wholly preoccupied with the subject?”¹ From the start, one may wonder, against the dominant current, whether this is the right kind of question to raise and seek to address in reviewing and evaluating Foucault’s contribution. Leaving this question aside however, Paras seems to suggest in any case that, in view of such a “dramatic shift,” we need to move to another level of interpretation of Foucault’s work, and another version altogether in the assessment of his legacy, 22 years after his untimely death.

His main contention is that many contemporary philosophers and Foucault scholars have minimized the significance of his late recovery of “a more robust concept of subjectivity” for two reasons mainly. The first one is that they did not have access to his lectures—courses at the College de France from 1978 to 1983, or the recorded tapes thereof. The second is because, like Luc Ferry and Alain Renault (1985/1990),² who had a political agenda or a philosophical ax to grind against Foucault and others leading radical French philosophers of the 60’s, they doubted the sincerity of Foucault’s late conversion or transformation, or simply viewed it as somehow too little too late.³

Subsequently, Paras proposes a new reading and interpretation, which takes ‘Foucault’s turn’ more seriously by looking into the highly insightful and revealing contents of the lectures and courses at the College de France. This is what he has done by listening to hours and hours of recordings. This point had been made, by the way, by Arnold Davidson, whose suggestion in this regard is here recognized as “the starting point of this work” and as “vindicated” by this work. Paras’ basic claim is that when we

* In obvious reference to the controversial book by Jean Baudrillard, *Oublier Foucault (Forget Foucault)*. Paris, Editions Galilee, 1977, with however the hope that this essay will not lead to the kind of unbridled and fruitless polemics that ensued its publication.

¹ Eric Paras. *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge*. (New York: The Other Press, 2006), 3.

² These two authors represent only two of the most vocal critics of the radical French philosophers of the 60’s, including Foucault, Deleuze, Bourdieu, Derrida, and Lacan, etc. They deliberately set out to recover and rehabilitate a number of concepts and notions such as history, the subject, rights, and neo-liberal humanism that had been put into question radically and seemed irretrievably lost by the end of the 60’s. In their highly polemical and controversial book, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: Essay on Anti-Humanism (La Pensee 68: Essai sur l’Anti-Humanisme Contemporain)*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985). Trans. Mary H.S. Cattani. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), they take aim at the radical anti-humanist critiques of these various authors in an effort to show why their respective views are either lacking in originality in retrospect and in the final analysis or untenable because inconsistent and even contradictory, and therefore not worth contending with. They downplay the obvious attempts by some of the targets here in question to qualify and substantiate their newly evolving positions in defense of some ‘recovered’ or ‘qualified’ notions of subject and subjectivity, and a return to more optimistic ethico-political horizon than either of their previous works could justify.

³ Paras, 157.

do, we would then have to recognize that Foucault “liquidated” or “repudiated” his earlier archeological work as well as his strong genealogical views, and moved on to articulate a position that is best characterized as *beyond power and knowledge*. Such a position now countenances, in his view, a stronger and more robust notion of subject and subjectivity than one could ever have expected to find in Foucault’s work.

But did Foucault really move beyond his earlier archeological-genealogical work? Did he move *beyond power and knowledge* altogether –as Paras argues? Or did he extend his work further, onto a different kind of question from the ones that preoccupied him earlier –one that required a theoretical and methodological shift, just as in the past studies required such a shift in order to better delineate and articulate the kind of *problematique* that interested him? And did he, as a result, convey instead a more moderate, tempered, and qualified position in this regard, one to which he was led by the very nature of the “object-domain” on which his inquiries focused –whether it be madness, illness, labor, life, or language, criminality, punishment, desire or sexuality? What notion of subject and subjectivity does Foucault’s later work countenance –as opposed to his earlier work? Are these notions as we find them in his late works as strong and robust as Paras claims they are, and do they warrant the kind of interpretation Paras advances? Doesn’t such an interpretation make Foucault almost unrecognizable, at least if we take Foucault’s own characterization of his project seriously as I think we should? This essay will seek to address these kinds of questions and many others as well.

Paras’ book is carefully researched, scrupulously documented, well-written, and well-structured text. It is properly speaking inscribed with the intellectual history of contemporary French philosophy. It consists essentially of three main parts preceded by an introduction into “the Foucauldian archive,” and followed by a conclusion characterizing “Foucault’s pendulum swing” as he presumably returned in his later works, according to Paras, to a position he held at the beginning of his career. Each part deals with various issues of Foucault’s work around the central notions of Discourse, Power, and Subjects. It also contains abundant notes and original translations of new materials (interviews, essays, articles, etc) heretofore perhaps little known of the broad academic community, as well as a very helpful bibliography of both primary and secondary sources.

Paras’ proposed radical re-interpretation of Foucault’s philosophical odyssey and ultimate assessment of his legacy, and particularly, his account of the so-called “return to the subject,” on such a rich and highly documented basis, make it look like a serious contender, one that we should probably take seriously, or in any case, one that should not be dismissed casually. But whether or not it does established itself as a compelling one, or the next most widely accepted interpretation, as Foucault 2.0, as Paras puts it, remains to be seen. It will depend obviously on how well it passes the test of critical scrutiny and debate (to which this essay is attempting to contribute), as more scholars have a chance to examine and re-examine the contents of Foucault’s lectures, courses as well as his later works afresh. In the meantime however, I believe that one could quite legitimately take issue with a number of its (major and minor) assumptions and contentions in an effort to suggest already that we may have to consider an alternative interpretation, Foucault 2.1

(or perhaps more modestly 2.01). This is essentially what I intend to do here, albeit in a somewhat limited manner.

My analysis will be underwritten by one meta-rule, or methodological constraint. A compelling interpretation is one that is respectful of both the spirit and the letter of author's enterprise in its multiple incarnations, and heeds as much as possible the hermeneutical injunction to strike a judicious balance between the propensity to 'add too much (idealization) and the propensity to 'leave out too much (abstraction).

In anticipation, I take issue with, and oppose Paras' reading and interpretation on a number of crucial fronts—at least the following three. (1) For one thing, contrary to Paras and what many other readers of Foucault claim (esp., in the Anglo-American world),⁴ I uphold the view that there is in fact a continuous and consistent thread that runs through Foucault's whole work.⁵ It is one, however, that has been modulated, qualified, reformulated, and even modified to some extent by his dogged forays and inquiries into new domains and by the different kinds of questions that he raises and addresses in his later works. In this regard, I disagree with Paras' central claim that Foucault somehow "liquidated" or "repudiated" his earlier archeological and genealogical approach, and even adopted "a new hermeneutical text-driven method" in the later part of his career.

On another front (2), I propose to take Foucault's words and his own characterization of his project more seriously. I don't mean to suggest as a general hermeneutical principle that this is what we should always do with respect to the work of any philosopher. In some cases obviously, it may well be that the philosopher's own words do not get the desired textual support, tensions and inconsistencies must therefore be brought to light and explained (or explained away, if possible). In Foucault's case however, such a precept has some significant consequences, not the least of which is that it enables us to sustain the continuous yet modulated thread that runs this entire work—though it is admittedly far from being complete or entirely satisfactory in all respects. In many instances, the fibers constituting the thread have been uneven, of different length or strength. And so, there is undoubtedly a lot of fodder for dissatisfaction with Foucault's work. Nevertheless, I here submit that contributing to *a history of truth* and *the subject*—rather than *power* or *knowledge* as such—has been the single most overriding concern of Foucault. Or to put it another way, this has been the consistent theme that runs through his entire corpus, and that can best serve to tie it together. This is, in any case, how (in retrospect) he himself characterized his whole work on a number of occasions toward the end of his life.

⁴ Over the years, I have come to believe that there seems to be a French Foucault and an American Foucault. By this, I mean to say that his work seems at times to be interpreted and understood in markedly different ways on either side of the Atlantic. The cross-over to the US seems to have led to a Foucault that many French interpreters—colleagues and former students—don't always recognize. See Nader N. Chokr, "Foucault Revisited: On the Analytics of Power," 2002 (unpublished manuscript) for a more perspicuous analysis in this regard dealing with divergent interpretations of the notion of 'power'.

⁵ As Foucault himself tried to suggest in the Preface written after the fact to the second volume of his *History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1984).

Taking an overall retrospective view, Foucault writes: “There is irony in those efforts one makes to alter one’s way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from here. Did mine actually result in a different way of thinking? Perhaps *at most* they made it possible to go back through what I had done from a new vantage point and in a clearer light... I seem to have gained a better perspective on the way I worked –gropingly, and by means of different or successive fragments – on this project, whose goal is *a history of truth*.”⁶

In another context, Foucault described his project as mainly concerned with studying all the forms and modalities of the “*will to truth*,” by which a civilization such as ours has come to divide up everything in terms of those things are (said to be) true and those things that are (said to be) false. He has endeavored to show how such a will has operated under different and successive regimes of truth-games, relative to different domains and different periods in history. “After all, Foucault writes, what I have held to, what I have tried to maintain for many years, is the effort to isolate some of the elements that might be useful for *a history of truth*.⁷ It should be stressed that Foucault was not interested “in a history that would be concerned with what might be true (or false) in the fields of learning.” Rather, he was interested, as he puts it very clearly, in the question of truth, i.e., “in an analysis of the ‘games of truth,’ the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as *experience*; that is, as something that can and must be thought.”⁸ He thus applied himself to analyzing the truth-games by which man proposed to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad or ill, as living, speaking, and laboring, or when he judges and punishes. And toward the end of his career and life, he took up the question of with regards to how human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals.

In every case-study, Foucault felt compelled to operate a theoretical shift so as to better diagnose and reveal what these truth-games covered up: in the first instance, “what was often designated as the advancement of learning” or the accumulation of knowledge. This led him to examine the forms of discursive practices that articulated the human sciences. In the second instance, “what is often described as the manifestations of power”; this led him to analyze the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques that serve to articulate the exercise of powers. In third instance, in order to analyze “the subject,” he found it appropriate to focus on “the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject.”⁹

In each and all of his studies, Foucault opted to study “truth-games” in the exteriority of *discourses* –as autonomous and specific entities, in a space somehow anterior to *words* and *things*. Such a space often calls upon words and strings thereof

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. II: *The Use of Pleasure*. (UP hereafter), p. 11; italics added. The relevance of this passage for finding the most appropriate and perspicuous *metaphor* that can best serve to characterize Foucault’s entire work will become obvious in due course.

⁷ UP, p. 6; italics added.

⁸ UP, pp. 6-7; italics added. How we understand and interpret the notion of “experience” in different parts of Foucault’s work will prove crucial in due course –for or against Paras’ interpretation.

⁹ UP, p. 6.

however, and even implicate real things (institutions, social and political practices), without however being necessarily the truth that discourse must somehow express or reveal. For Foucault, discourses are not constituted by somehow weaving the ‘objectivity of things’ with the ‘arbitrary’ vocabulary of our language. He is not interested in determining whether discourse establishes a certain truth about things. Rather he is more concerned with how discourses are fabricated by what men say and do in different situations or from different institutional sites; with how they issue and are produced from the side of things or on the sites of things, according to different rules of formation in different domains and at different periods of history. In other words, his question was how from the exteriority of things a discourse may emerge, following a number of specific rules which end up regulating this discourse from the inside? Most emphatically, Foucault was never interested in the traditional philosophical problem, consisting in figuring out how from the interior of an individual consciousness or subject, words are produced which are more or less truthful representations of the external world of things. This is the question of idealism --and arguably the question of the whole of Western philosophy, insofar as, Foucault would argue, philosophy must somehow be idealistic, otherwise it is something else altogether.

Instead, Foucault has been interested in telling a different kind of story (than the ones commonly accepted or considered) about *the subject of knowledge*, *the subject of power/knowledge*, and *the subject of ethics*, as a self relates to himself, or contemplates his relation to himself. Here is how Foucault himself summarizes his trajectory, once again: “[A]fter studying the games of truth (*jeux de verite*) in their interplay with one another, as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then studying their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices –*I felt obliged to study* the games of truth in the relationship of self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called “the history of desiring man.”... It seemed to me that by framing the question in this way, and by attempting to develop it for a period that was rather far from the horizons with which I was familiar, *I would be going more closely into the inquiry that I have long been committed to...*”¹⁰

Finally (3), on a very specific, but important point (noted above), having to do with the status and conception of “(lived) experience” in Foucault’s early vs. later works, I will argue that Paras has simply misunderstood and egregiously misinterpreted Foucault. To the extent that Paras’ radical re-interpretation about Foucault’s philosophical odyssey hinges on what he makes of this notion, I contend that he has therefore missed his target altogether.

2. The Foucauldian Body of Work or Corpus Here in Question

¹⁰ UP, pp. 6; 7; italics added.

To begin with, it might be useful for our present purpose to adopt a simplified working periodization of Foucault's work. Leaving aside his literary excursions and productions, esp., during the time of his involvement with the *Tel Quel* group in the late 50s-early 60s (as well as on and off in following years), and focusing strictly on the historical and philosophical works of "the early period," then the following well-known published works must unquestionably and minimally be included. They are: *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and the *History of Sexuality* Vol. I: *The Will to Know* (1976); Vol. II: *The Use of Pleasure* (1984); Vol. III: *The Care of the Self* (1984).¹¹

However, after what we might consider to be a brief period of transition during the 8-years hiatus (1976-1984) between major publications, Foucault delivered a number of very important lectures-courses, starting in 1978. These are obviously of particular significance for understanding the marked distancing from his earlier interests and "problematics." They are also very helpful for taking a proper measure of the shift that his thinking has somehow undergone in "the late period,"¹² at the end of his career, esp., with regard to his so-called "return to the subject and morality," his more optimistic ethical-political horizon, as well as his connection with the legacy of the Enlightenment. These lectures-courses include: (a) *Security, Territory, and Population* (1978); (b) *The Birth of Bio-Politics* (1979); (c) *The Government of the Living* (1980); (d) *Subjectivity and Truth* (1981); (e) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1982), and (f) *The Government of*

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, I will be referring throughout to the dates of the original publications in French.

¹² It has been a common practice among scholars to distinguish between the early and late works of Foucault, and debate the question of continuity and discontinuity that may or may not exist in his entire corpus, as well as the significance, if any, that may (or not) be attributed to the various shifts, turns, or mere changes in emphasis and focus in his work –particularly with reference to the return of subject and morality, and how to best understand it. See Nader N. Chokr, "Foucault on Power and Resistance—Another Take: Toward a Post-postmodern Political Philosophy," *International Conference on 'Resistance' –organized the Society for European Philosophy*, Greenwich University, (London, UK, August 2004).

the Self and of Others (1983).¹³ Several of these lectures have now been published in French, and are progressively being translated in English –in part or in full.¹⁴

3. The Crucial Notion of “Problematizations”

The term “problematics” used above is intended to conjure up from the start the related term of ‘*problematization(s)*.’ As Foucault’s readers (should) know, this notion became central for Foucault in the later part of his career, as he now sought to characterize in retrospect all of his inquiries in terms of a “common thread,” and as have been concerned with what these terms convey and designate. And this, whether it be regarding how we are constituted as knowing subjects, as subjects who endure power-relations or exercise power, or as self-constituted moral subjects of our own actions, and therefore capable of some form of *subjectivation*.¹⁵

These terms designate broadly speaking the ways in which, or modalities in terms of which, an object of thought, an experience, or a practice is apprehended as a problem, or in terms of which “a problem” is formulated. It is concerned with a number of related questions. What makes such a formulation in terms of ‘problems’ (presumably with alternative possible solutions) meaningful? What kinds of assumptions are made? What constraints are set in place? What ‘facts’ are acknowledged? What ‘interpretations’ are made or possible? What relations can be ascertained or established between facts and interpretations? What rules are followed? What ‘objects’ are thereby defined? What themes or thematics are considered? What relations (to self, others) are countenanced in

¹³ As it turned out, and as Paras correctly notes, the titles of Foucault’s lectures were often deliberately misleading (an indication perhaps of his playfulness and sly sense of humor) and misnomers for the actual specific contents that he ends up covering. They are nevertheless a good indication that something is afoot in his thinking –i.e., that something like a shift is apparently taking place. In this context, we may also note that Foucault’s magnum opus, *Les Mots et les Choses* (*The Order of Things*) was about anything but words (*mots*) and things (*choses*) or even their putative and actual relations. As he himself once pointed out, as I recall, in one of his lectures at the College de France, it was a trap deliberately set out (as a Zen master would do with his use of a *koan*) to ‘upset’ the ‘natural mind-set’ of his readers, and make them wonder or ponder about his real interest and focus. That is, *discourses*, as autonomous and specific domains, with their own ‘objects’ and ‘rules of formations’ and a certain ‘internal consistency,’ always apprehended from a displaced point of exteriority, in a space anterior to *words* and *things*, even though they often implicated words or strings thereof, and were sometimes about things or issuing from the sites or sides of things. In this sense, his book was certainly not a work on linguistics, nor was it a work natural or political ontology, even though it was about speaking and language (grammar), living (natural history), and laboring (political economy). Properly speaking, it was archeological in its approach, and squarely interested in ascertaining *strata* within discourses and taking seriously the displacements and discontinuities found operating in them.

¹⁴ See for example, Paul Rabinow, (eds.). *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* Vol. I: *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. (New York: The New Free Press, 1994). Several reviews and papers discussing them have appeared in previous issues of *Foucault-Studies*. See for example, Mark Kelly, Review of “Michel Foucault: The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982.” Edited by Frederic Gros. Translated by Graham Burchnell. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). *Foucault-Studies* 3: 107-112, Nov 2005; Sebastian Harrer, “The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault’s Lecture Series L’Hermeneutique du Sujet.” *Foucault-Studies* 2: 75-96, May 2005; Ben Golder, Review of “Eduardo Mendieta and Jeffrey Paris. Biopolitics and Racism. Special Issue of *Radical Philosophy Review* 7/1 (2004). *Foucault-Studies* 3: 121-126, Nov 2005.

¹⁵ I will return in due course to these two notions of “problematizations” and “subjectivation” in order to characterize in a more perspicuous manner the element of novelty in Foucault’s later works.

the manner in which a problem is conceived or a “*problematique*” articulated?

One might say generally speaking that Foucault is now interested in doing “genealogies of problems, or *problematiques*” –as he puts it in one of his interviews in 1983 with Rabinow and Dreyfus, “On the Genealogy of the History of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress.”¹⁶ In the final version of the Preface to the three *History of Sexuality* volumes (published separately) that he completed, Foucault candidly confesses. “I seem to be able to see better now, in what way, somewhat blindly, and by various incremental steps, I have proceeded in this endeavor on the *history of truth*: by analyzing neither behaviors nor ideas, neither societies nor their ‘ideologies,’ but the *problematizations* through human beings have been, can and must be apprehended in thought and the *practices* on the basis of which they are formed. The *archeological* dimension permits the analysis of the forms that problematization may take; its *genealogical* dimension, their formation on the basis of practices and their modifications.”¹⁷

Elsewhere, in the “Concern for Truth,” Foucault states most crucially: “The notion which serves as a common thread to all of the studies that I have undertaken since *Madness and Civilization* is that of *problematization* –even though I had not yet sufficiently isolated this notion. But one always gets to the heart of the matter by going backwards; those things that are most general always appear in the last instance. It is the ransom and reward of any work in which the theoretical stakes are elaborated on the basis of a certain empirical domain.” He then defines “problematization” more explicitly first by saying what it is not: “[it] does not mean representation of a preexisting object nor creation through discourse of an object that does not exist.” Secondly, by characterizing it more positively, as “the set of all the *discursive* and *non-discursive* practices which put something into play within the truth-and-false game(s), and thereby constitutes it as an object for thought, whether it be in the form of ethical reflection, scientific knowledge, or political analysis, etc.”¹⁸

4. Eric Paras’ Reading and Re-Interpretation, or Foucault 2.0

I agree with Paras’ main contention as articulated above (in the introduction, 2nd paragraph), and most specifically, with both of the points he makes. I think that he performs a valuable service by providing extended critical discussions of the contents of Foucault’s lectures [esp., (b)-(c) as well as (d)-(e)] in an effort to reveal, as he puts it, the “enormity of the shift”¹⁹ that had taken place in Foucault’s thinking with regards to his so-called “return to the subject.” I also agree that of all the lectures listed above, the ones he delivered in 1978 were still framed with the ‘problematics’ of his earlier so-called

¹⁶ In *Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 340-72.

¹⁷ In Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Eds.). *Dits et Ecrits II: 1976-1988*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1364; (my translation).

¹⁸ In *Dits et Ecrits II*, 1489; (my translations; italics added). See also “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations” (1984). In *The Essential Foucault*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. (New York: The New Press, 2003), 18-24.

¹⁹ Paras, 157.

‘strong’ genealogical phase, and may therefore be said to correspond to the transition period, when Foucault was arguably still groping for an alternative forward thrust altogether.²⁰ However, as I have already suggested and as we shall see more clearly later on, I disagree with the way in which Paras characterizes the “enormity of the shift,” Foucault’s “return” as well as the notion of “subject” to which he is presumably returning.

According to Paras, the result of the still dominant yet deficient interpretation is that Foucault’s philosophical career is read like a kind of *arrow’s flight*, with a straight trajectory and an unwavering determination to deconstruct the subject. He refers here for example to Habermas’ posthumous assessment (1994) of Foucault’s work, whose title presumably implies the metaphor.²¹ I agree with Paras that such a metaphor is inadequate for characterizing in a most general way Foucault’s work taken in its totality. The *pendulum’s swing*, Paras argues, might instead be a more accurate depiction.

His alternative metaphor serves his purpose in characterizing Foucault’s entire corpus as consisting ultimately of three periods. (1) The first one starts presumably from a position in which he somehow still admitted or countenanced the possibility of individual experience and subjectivity. (2) The second one moves onto a period in-between, during which Foucault articulated the 20th century’s most devastating critique of the (free) subject. Finally (3), in the third one, one presumably sees Foucault returning or swinging back (25 years later) to a position that “looked *not a little like* his starting point” in that he now acknowledged “the existence of a *pre-discursive subject*, enraptured by literature, politically unaffiliated, and pledged to *a kind of experience* that pushed the limits of the known.”²²

With regards to the first period, Paras writes: “Arguably, it was his awareness that certain kinds of subjects (with distinct “lived experiences”) had been suppressed merely because of the label one had affixed to them –‘mad,’ ‘demented,’ ‘enraged’—that motivated him to write in the first place.”²³ Assuming this is true (and it may well be), it is nevertheless questionable whether Foucault’s *psychological motivation* to write constitutes an adequate basis for interpreting the *philosophical position* he sought to defend in his early works.²⁴

As I see it, and to jump right in the midst of controversy, the notion of “experience” implicated in Foucault’s early works –starting with *Madness and Civilization*—is different from the one we find in his later works. Moreover, this difference is indeed very significant for understanding properly the final thrust of

²⁰ Paras, 92ff.

²¹ Interestingly enough, Habermas’ piece is titled: “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present” In Michael Kelly (Ed.). *Critique and Power*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 149-156.

²² Paras, 157-8; italics added.

²³ Paras, 158.

²⁴ It is clear that in the case of Foucault we cannot reasonably make or assume a total divorce between the *lived experience* of the man and the philosophical *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, such a consideration does not warrant a (psychologically) reductive reading of his work.

Foucault's work. In the former, it designates that 'continent' or 'zone' which discourse seeks somehow to master, domesticate, and control. It is in effect the experience of the mad, the sick, the criminal, or generally speaking that of the deviant and marginal. In other words, it is the figure of the Other of discourse and of mastery; it is, so to speak, the "romantic" figure of the Other –confined to the asylum, the hospital or the prison— that society wishes to forget, and yet, that the apparatus of knowledge seeks to control and dominate in some ways or others.

In contrast, in the later works, the notion of "experience" becomes arguably the very object of problematisation itself, on the basis of the materiality of needs and desires to create forms through which these needs and desires will be apprehended in thought, lived, and even disciplined, dominated or even controlled, but no longer (or necessarily) repressed or oppressed. This is in my view the crux of the matter. Hence, the constitution of a self as subject (not to be taken here in the traditional philosophical sense of consciousness of oneself, self-consciousness or self-awareness) becomes real –at once through real practices of *austerity* as well as practices of *freedom*.

The subject exists in a culture and is therefore real. Its reality is, however, both constituted and self-constituted. It is in other words both historical and foundational. It is historical in the sense of being constituted by various practices as well as moral, medical, and philosophical doctrines (e.g., those of pythagorism, Platonism, stoicism, or the great Greek physicians). However, it is also and at the same time founder of judgments and behaviors which condition the life of those who have taken it upon themselves to heed the *work on oneself*, of *subjectivation*, and therefore, of *self-constitution* and act accordingly.

In any case, one could well argue that for Foucault "experience" –whether it be of sexuality, madness, illness, punishment, living, laboring and speaking, etc-- was somehow always viewed as "the correlation, in a culture, between various domains of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity" (UP, p. 4) –whether it be constituted or self-constituted, it is important to add. In effect, experience was viewed as that which can and must always be apprehended in thought, examined, problematized, with the 'problematization' to be eventually resolved one way or another.²⁵

Concerning the second period, Paras assumes that it covers all of Foucault's well-known archeological and genealogical studies. Unlike other authors [e.g., Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), Beatrice Han (2000)],²⁶ he does not claim that there is a strong and substantial (theoretical and methodological) discontinuity or rupture between these two phases of his inquiries into regimes of *truth-games/discourses* with regards to *knowledge*

²⁵ *Dits et Ecrits*, II, 1359; 136 (my translation). Foucault's conception of *ethics* and *freedom* (in opposition to the traditional Kantian view) can easily be derived from the line of thinking sketched out above. I will show in due course how and why.

²⁶ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd Edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983; Beatrice Han. *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

and with regards to *power/knowledge*.²⁷ Instead, he sees correctly, I believe, that the genealogical one follows naturally from the kind of questions and concerns arrived at the term of his archeological inquiries –and which are arguably already contained there, albeit in implicit or embryonic terms. However, rather going on to claim, as Paras does, that Foucault repudiates these orientations in the end, I contend that he never did. Instead, he continued to push ahead by applying them differently to a different domain of experience --other than those that preoccupied him earlier-- namely, that of desire and sexuality, as it emerged in various practices, discourses, and “prescriptive texts” from ancient Greece and Imperial Rome, and thereby dealing with a period that he was not familiar with.

Finally, with regards to the third period, Paras claims that Foucault seems to have altogether abandoned his previous methods and adopted instead “a text-driven hermeneutical method.” This is, I believe, a serious point of contention, about which, as I have just pointed out, and as I will argue again later on, I beg to differ. In the later works, Foucault turned to the study of the forms and modalities according to which individuals are able to recognize themselves as (desiring or sexual) subjects, (and are, generally speaking, able to relate to themselves in moral terms, and thereby constitute and recognize themselves as subjects). This was in effect the last part of his three-part inquiry into the subject –as (1) subject of knowledge, (2) subject of power, and now, as (3) subject of morality. In so doing, he was undertaking in his own words “a genealogical project.” Such a task required him to turn his attention, as he puts it, to certain ancient “prescriptive texts.” Moreover, these in turn required that appropriate archeological, genealogical, and hermeneutical tools and methodologies be deployed so as to make sense of the “practices of the self” they contained or recommended, as well as their specific “problematizations” of self-creation and self-constitution, and of the modalities of subjectivation.²⁸ However, does this mean that Foucault has altogether opted for a new method and repudiated or jettisoned altogether his previous ones? Once again, I don’t think so. Paras’ take in this regard is in my view seriously questionable. He seems to be making a mole-hill out of some rather scattered and scant indices, put together in a dubious way in support of an interpretive stance which sacrifices too much in the end of Foucault’s work in order to fabricate its ‘rectitude.’ This point will be clarified further in a moment.

Paras also states, in a somewhat melodramatic way, that “in a voice that by the end trembled from pain and debility, Foucault “liquidated” his critique of the subject. He goes on to conclude in the final lines of his book: “For, the notion of the end of subjectivity had offered a kind of cold clarity, as well as an immensely thought-provoking lens through which to view the world. But ultimately, only the notion of *strong subjectivity* proved *warm* enough to accommodate an overwhelming passion for life and an inextinguishable belief in the primacy of human liberty.”²⁹

²⁷ Paras, 10-11; 52-4.

²⁸ *Dits et Ecrits II*, 1360.

²⁹ Paras, 158; italics added.

It is true that ‘liberty’ or ‘freedom’ has been in some sense Foucault’s overriding concern.³⁰ It must be added however that he was especially interested in pointing out that it too (along with the notions of ‘truth,’ ‘subject,’ ‘man,’ ‘knowledge,’ etc) had a history, and that we should perhaps be careful not to take our current conception(s) for granted – as if they are necessary, universal or eternal. It must also be said that his conception is far from being simply a mere re-appropriation of the liberal, humanist or existentialist perspective on this score. For now, it shall suffice to point out that freedom for Foucault consists in a practice, rather than the inherent condition of an autonomous, rational, and moral individual. As such, it must somehow be won over and over again, repeatedly, in a continuous manner, and indefinitely. The kind of freedom we enjoy will depend in part on the way of life (*ethos*) we somehow choose for ourselves.³¹

The thrust of Paras’ overall discussion seems to imply somehow that there is a (straightforward or simplistic) recovery of the traditional liberal or existentialist, humanist subject in Foucault’s later work. But I don’t think this is the case. Foucault was far too critical and radical (having gone through the most sustained and devastating archeological and genealogical deconstructions) to merely return to notions (of subjectivity, experience, agency, autonomy, and reflection), *as if* they could be somehow recovered un-touched and un-informed by his earlier critical analyses.

Under a certain construal of the *principle of charity* (as articulated by Donald Davidson) in matters of interpretation, consistency with what may be reasonably deemed the most inclusive and over-arching thrust of a philosopher’s work is bound to constitute a substantial comparative advantage –relative to interpretations that fails to heed this hermeneutical and pragmatic constraint. The interpretation that Paras offers is ultimately problematic, I believe, precisely for this reason. As a result, like other reconstructive proposals, it arguably fails to strike a proper and judicious balance. Paradoxically enough, his reconstructed intellectual history of Foucault’s journey both ‘adds’ and ‘leaves out’ too much. It is as if it is unable to strike the proper balance between ‘abstraction’ and ‘idealization’; it both abstracts (leaves out) too much and idealizes (by adding) too much.

This is precisely the point where I part company with Paras. For, I don’t think that Foucault had simply returned to the exact same position he previously held –assuming of course that he previously held the position that Paras attributes to him. As I suggested earlier, we have good reasons for doubting Paras’ take, which, as suggested above, is based on a questionable construal of “experience” in Foucault’s early vs. later works. Paras’ periodization of Foucault’s career depends on such a construal (and this is in my view a serious point of contention), according to which, as mentioned earlier, Foucault’s first major works (literary as well as historical-philosophical) countenanced a notion of “(lived) experience” and therefore, a notion of “pre-discursive subjectivity.” Once again, I would argue here that the notion of “experience” that we find in Foucault’s earlier

³⁰ See John Rajchman. *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

³¹ I will later on clarify Foucault’s view on liberty (or freedom), in contrast with Kant’s, for example –as I believe this to a crucial point for understanding his later work. This should also help clarify the reason why I reject Paras’ interpretation on this point.

works should be interpreted as upholding some sort of “pre-discursive subjectivity,” let alone one that he presumably rehabilitated *as is* in his later works, 25 years later? Besides, if Foucault’s philosophical temperament (to use William James’ expression) is of any relevance at all for understanding his odyssey, it is hard to think that he would simply recover and re-validate a position that he held at the beginning of his career –esp., given what we know about his deliberate and assertive “intellectual nomadism.”³²

As for which metaphor can best serve to capture and characterize in most general terms Foucault’s odyssey, I agree with Paras that a *straight arrow* (Habermas) is not an appropriate and judicious one. But neither is that of a *pendulum swing* (Paras). Metaphor for metaphor, I submit instead that of a *flexible spiral*.³³ As a spiral, its end-points don’t

necessarily touch each other, or coincide, and cannot therefore be said to be indistinguishable; any return to a previous point, if any can be ascertained, must be viewed as coming back to a slightly different and modified point –different precisely because modified by the path or trajectory taken previously and covered by first going. Because it is also flexible however, it may be viewed as bending at times in one direction or another in such a way as to rectify Foucault’s occasional rhetorical excesses as well as mitigate the theoretical and conceptual tensions he confronted, or the tactical or pedagogical exaggerations he sometimes engaged in.

Foucault’s philosophical odyssey has confused and confounded sympathizers and critics alike. This is no doubt due at least in part to the sheer creativity that he was able to display in a relatively short life, exploring different kinds of questions and directions, adopting different methodologies and terminologies, changing focus and emphasis at different times. Foucault was anything but a systematic philosopher proceeding on the basis of a few dogmatically held first principles or even foundational intuitions. But in another part, it was also due to his philosophical temperament, which made him relish surprising his readers by going places where we did not expect to find him, and by taking rather unexpected positions.³⁴ He furthermore affirmed his “intellectual nomadism”³⁵ by

³² Admittedly, the objections and counter-claims made herein (above and further below) require more detailed and substantial, text-driven arguments and defenses than I can give here, but they may nevertheless be viewed as opening up some possible lines of criticisms.

³³ See previous passage quoted from Foucault in note 6.

³⁴ His statements in the introduction to the *Archeology of Knowledge* are quite telling in this regard, as well as about his distinctive sense of humor. It may be worth recalling here is what he says in response to the questions of an imaginary “hostile interviewer”: “Aren’t you sure of what you’re saying? Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that the objections are not really directed at the place from which you are speaking? Are you going to declare yet again that you have never been what you have been reproached with being? Are you already preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you are now doing: *no, no, I am not there where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, looking on and laughing at you?*” In response, Foucault says: “What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing -with a rather shaky hand- a labyrinth into which I could venture, in which I could move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. *I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to*

emphatically stating his right to change his mind as he progressed in his investigations, and showed a boundless propensity and capacity to reinterpret his past efforts and achievements in light of his current concerns and projects, and what's even more confusing, in the conceptual and theoretical terminology and language pertaining to the latter.

However, despite Foucault's affirmation of his right to constantly re-invent himself, to change his mind, and dart off in unpredictable directions, his readers are also right in seeking "to pin him down," and holding him down to some minimal rules of consistency. As Paras correctly notes, Foucault himself has certainly not made this task easy as his intellectual *modus operandi* was quintessentially Nietzschean. He was fiercely anti-systematic as a philosopher, who viewed consistency as "the hobgoblin of small minds," and restrictive of his *freedom of thought*.³⁶

These kinds of considerations notwithstanding, scholars have for the most part pretty much understood the fundamental challenge that Foucault's early works had posed to traditional humanism, the hegemony of 'man,' or the sovereignty and autonomy of the 'subject.'³⁷

remain the same. Leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write." (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Harper Books, 1972), 17; italics added.

³⁵ One could even say that for Foucault—and Deleuze as well-- such an affirmation is part and parcel of his critical strategy and political stance aimed at putting in question and in crisis the constitutive or determinant normalizing and disciplinary forces of society and culture. It is in effect one way by which an individual can practice his freedom and to some extent constitute himself differently as a subject. This notion is different from the one that one finds implicated in the work of Kenneth White, for example, the proponent of a new program known as "*geopoetics*" which seeks to radically redefine the relationship of man to the world in a post-Cartesian, post-Modern, and post-Humanist way. In the latter, "intellectual nomadism" seems to consist in a form of "cultural butterflying" whereby the poet-thinker feels free to appropriate and re-appropriate whatever 'cultural nuggets' or 'pearls of wisdom' he finds in any and all cultural, intellectual, poetic and philosophical traditions. See his *L'Esprit Nomade*. Paris: Grasset, 1987.

³⁶ The way in which the notions of "freedom" and "thought" are implicated in Foucault's work is crucial. We shall hopefully see why by the end of this essay. This also seems to be a decisive point for Paras as well, but for other reasons.

³⁷ One should perhaps note, in passing, that some authors object to leaving out the literary works [such as *Raymond Roussel* (1963), for example] for, they claim, these productions already contain precursor signs and motifs of what Foucault will end up developing in his more historical-philosophical writings. This may well be the case, and could be therefore the object of studies seeking to ascertain these connections. Others authors (e.g., Paras 2006) believe furthermore that the so-called "early phase" of Foucault's career could in fact be divided into two moments—from, say 1961 to 1965, and from 1966 to 1976). In the first moment, they claim, Foucault still countenanced a notion of "lived experience" (of the mad, the patient, or the criminal for example) and had not yet completely done away with all terms redolent of individual subjectivity and agency, as he would do in the second moment—from 1966 to 1976. We are thus back to the issue raised earlier with regards to the appropriate way to interpret the notions of 'lived experience' and 'subjectivity' that are presumably countenanced or put into play in Foucault's early works. The periodization proposed here may well be supported by textual evidence, and even corroborated by future research and scholarship for whatever it is worth. It may even be helpful for a more fine-grained reconstruction and assessment of Foucault's early work. But one may still question, as I pointed out earlier, whether the view imputed here to Foucault is accurate, and whether it justifies the new interpretation of his work proposed on this basis.

As for the second part of his career, the one that followed thereafter, from 1976 to 1984, the year of his untimely death, it is widely recognized to have been more challenging and difficult to understand. This is due, in part, to the fact Foucault had not published any major works until 1984 --when the long-awaited volumes II and III of the *History of Sexuality* (respectively sub-titled *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*) finally came out.³⁸ And in another part, this also due to the fact, pointed out earlier, that up until recently most scholars did not have access to his lectures-courses at the College de France, particularly those from 1979 to 1983.

This was however a period during which, Paras claims, Foucault abandoned the so-called “structuralist program” that he once upheld and advocated presumably, and that he later claimed never to have adopted, but only to have extended some of its insights and techniques into an area in which it had theretofore never been applied. Typical Foucauldian move, some might argue, on a note of skepticism. My take on this issue is as follows. There may have been some obvious affinities between Foucault’s archeological investigations of discourses and the then dominant program of structuralism –their interest and focus on the underlying *system* of regularities beyond or beneath the grasp of individual consciousness. These can be supported by a number of Foucault’s own statements, esp., when he sought to demarcate his approach from the existentialism and humanism of Sartre, for example. Paras does a good job bringing them up. However, Foucault’s line of inquiry was not in the end, strictly speaking, *structuralist*, as he later on sought desperately to point out in order to distinguish and demarcate his enterprise further. The former was far more synchronic in its perspective, and attentive to stable, structural regularities (universals). Whereas the latter was far more diachronically inclined, and far more attentive to eruptions of singular events, disruptions, and displacements in the archeological strata of discourses (contingencies), systemic (ir) regularities as well as discontinuities over time, as we move from one historical period to another. It is not surprising that Foucault was often characterized (perhaps excessively) as “the philosopher of discontinuity.”

This was also the period during which, to the dismay of many, he showed a renewed interest in “the speaking, acting and creating subject,” Paras writes. But in fact, he has always been interested in such the subject –albeit from different angles or perspectives. In his later works, Foucault was in fact more interested in a self-defining, self-creating, self-constituting rather than merely defined, determined, constructed and constituted subject(ivity), and many other notions that he had previously worked hard to undermine, or rather, to ‘problematize,’ such as experience itself, freedom, individualism, and even human rights.³⁹

³⁸ What may not be widely known is that Foucault has planned on publishing at least two other works on the History of Sexuality, which never saw the light of day: the announced *Confessions of the Flesh* (*Les Aveux de la Chair*), and another one dealing with sexuality during the Reformation, which he reportedly destroyed. According to his long-time friend and companion, Daniel Defert, Foucault in fact wrote and destroyed several book-length manuscripts during that period.

³⁹ Paras, 101-148. I believe that it is important to understand Foucault’s deconstructions in this context as part and parcel of his radical critique and rejection of “humanism,” which he considered to be the

In my view, a close and judiciously calibrated scrutiny of Foucault's later period does indeed reveal a significant turn or shift from his earlier more constructivist and deterministic view of the efficacy of disciplinary and normalizing forces. This shift leads to an increased concern with the possibility of resistance to paranoid totalizing systems, pervasive and ubiquitous power mechanisms and *dispositifs*, and to an exploration of the possibilities for ethico-political action. However, and I would be prepared to argue this point at greater length, I think that the latter remain somehow limited and circumscribed, informed as they are and will remain by Foucault's earlier archeological and genealogical work –albeit in a toned down and more balanced version. His late works no longer see human beings as *merely* “constructed subjects,” objects of discipline and control, and more as beings with *some* capacity for *self-subjection*, i.e., for effective and reflective action, self-discipline, self-control and *limited* critical agency.⁴⁰

In support of this line of argument, the following reminders may here be helpful. In order to study ‘sexuality’ as a historically singular experience in Western societies, Foucault states that he needed the necessary tools and instruments for analyzing the three axes constituting it, in their proper character and in their correlations. These are: the discursive formations referring to it, the systems of power/knowledge regulating its practice, and the forms according to which individuals can and should recognize themselves as subjects of such sexuality. And as he points out: “But, *regarding the first two points, the work that I had previously undertaken* –whether it be about medicine or psychiatry, or whether it be about punitive power and disciplinary practices –has given me the tools I needed.” And he added: “The analysis of discursive practices enabled the tracking of the formation of knowledge by avoiding the dilemma between *science* and *ideology*; the analysis of power-relations and of their technologies enabled their apprehension as *open strategies* –by doing away with the alternative of a power conceived as domination or denounced as mere simulacrum. But as for the study of the ways according to which individuals are brought to recognize themselves as sexual subjects, it was fraught with difficulties.”⁴¹

In an effort however to tie together his various lines of inquiry, Foucault continues his discussion by pointing out, as noted already earlier, that a theoretical

perversion of all of our (philosophical) endeavors since the 19th century. He even once said, as I recall, that in the Modern Era “humanism” was our Middle Age, and that, just as the Modern era had to overcome the Middle Age, we need today overcome the figure of humanism that has imposed itself in all fields of knowledge and experience, and that is nowadays rarely if at all questioned. This is, I believe, a position he held until the very end. Though he invited critical thinking on the very notion of ‘human rights’ he never, to my knowledge, objected to the desirability of a growing culture of human rights as such. One might here object to a performative contradiction and therefore a mark of “philosophical bad faith.” But, as with every subject matter that has preoccupied Foucault, he was eager to point out the contingent historical conditions of emergence of certain forms and figures (whether it be of ‘man’ or ‘truth’), we have tended to take for granted ---as natural, necessary, universal or even eternal-- as well as their eventual, imminent displacements and disappearances. I will return to this all-most important theme at the end of this essay.

⁴⁰ Paul Veyne. “Foucault and Going Beyond (or the Fulfillment of) Nihilism.” In Timothy Armstrong (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 340-344.

⁴¹ *Dits et Ecrits*, II, 1359-60; my translation; italics added.

displacement is often required in his studies. Whether it be in order to interrogate and ‘problematize’ the discursive practices through which knowledge is produced, or to analyze what is often described under the various manifestations of power, and problematize its multiple relations, open strategies, and the rational techniques effectively underwriting its exercise. Similarly, a theoretical displacement is required in order to analyze what is commonly designated by ‘subject.’ For this reason, he writes: “It was necessary to figure out the forms and the modalities of relation to self according to which an individual constitutes and recognize himself as subject.”⁴²

Again, and in contrast to Paras, I don’t believe that we can view Foucault’s later work as having completely “liquidated” or “repudiated” his early work, or, as having simply gone *beyond power and knowledge*. For, to accept that he has, without further qualification, would require that we put aside all of Foucault’s efforts to bring out the “common thread” tying up all his different studies and inquiries as so many expressions of “philosophical bad faith.”⁴³ It also requires that we read into his later works (what is arguably not the case, namely) a radical (theoretical and methodological) discontinuity which can only be achieved by a selective and highly questionable (because uncharitable, in the sense defined earlier) interpretation, i.e., one, as I have suggested earlier, that both “adds and leaves out too much,” paradoxically enough.⁴⁴

For this reason, I don’t think one could not compare Foucault’s trajectory to that of Wittgenstein, for example, as he moved from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, or even to that of Heidegger *before* and *after* the *Kehre*. Instead, it seems that, over the course of his career, Foucault has progressively adjusted his views and positions, and has been brought to temper and rectify somewhat some of the excesses and extremisms of his earlier work. He was thereby able to clear out the theoretical and conceptual space for a different and increasingly extended set of questions, inquiries, or problematisations (ranging from the subject of knowledge and power/knowledge, and to the critical, and partially self-constituting subject), and ultimately, for examining the possibility of effective ethical-political action by this newly apprehended subject.

In addition, it is arguably not the case, as Paras contends, that Foucault has completely abandoned and rejected his archeological and genealogical method in favor a new text-driven hermeneutical method.⁴⁵ As I have suggested earlier, such a method, or rather, such a tool was required by the nature of the specific task at hand in his genealogical work. As Foucault has shown repeatedly, his approach is not that of a

⁴² *Dits et Ecrits*, II, 1359-60; my translation; italics added.

⁴³ It is the impression that I sometimes get from reading Paras’ interpretation. Are we justified in dismissing Foucault’s own words in this regard, unless we can catch him in some “*flagrant deli*” –i.e., contradicting himself, violating elementary strictures of logic and common-sense, or even deliberately misleading and manipulating his readers?

⁴⁴ See Harrer, 2005, for an argument against the current dominant interpretation, to the effect that there is in fact “a ‘conceptual continuity,’ rather than a break, between Foucault’s earlier works on normalizing power and his later works on ethical subjectivation and self-constitution. As far as I know such a perspective is more readily accepted by Foucault’s French readers than by their American counterpart.

⁴⁵ Paras, 12, 138ff.

doctrinaire or methodological chauvinist. If he has in later lectures and subsequent published works made a more focused or exclusive use of hermeneutical tools (which he has also used occasionally and in passing in his earlier works), this could not and should not be taken to indicate that he now favors this method over any others he had used before. In fact, given his often stated objections to the hermeneutics enterprise as it is commonly conceived in philosophy, it is doubtful that he would end up endorsing and adopting it.

In any case, if, when all is said and done, Foucault's entire work is perhaps best viewed, as he himself recommends, merely as a "tool box," then one could easily imagine that it will contain different, diverse and heteroclitic strategies, analytics, methods, and methodologies, suited or suitable for different tasks and purposes, applied differently in different domains. This is the least one could expect to find in the philosophical arsenal of an self-declared and principled "intellectual nomad."

5. Foucault's Philosophical Odyssey Revisited and Briefly Annotated

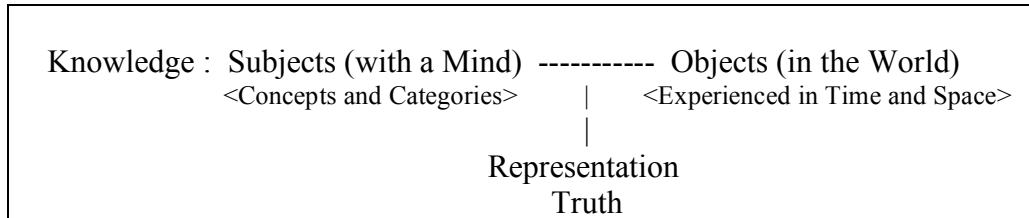
If I were asked: How would you map out and characterize briefly Foucault's philosophical odyssey? Here is how I would proceed. Naturally, in the present context, I can only skim and skip, condense and simplify, while trying nevertheless to give a fair and accurate account, one that is hopefully also relevant to the main points of contention herein.

His early work may be said to have consisted of two phases, in which he was concerned with controlling (1) systems of thought, discourse and knowledge and (2) systems of power/ knowledge.

In the phase that begins with *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and extends through *Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and his monumental work, *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault explores the dimension of knowledge, concentrating on what can be uttered and known in different discursive formations, different epochs of knowledge or *epistemes*. To put it in Kant's terminology, we might say that he sought to explore the conditions of possibility of what makes it possible to say or claim to know something about some specific entities. In other words, he was interested in analyzing a given regime of truth, under which some things are (not) said, are (not) known or claimed to be known, are (not) done and could (not) be done. From his vantage-point on discourses, 'saying' is form of 'doing,' and 'doing' is a form of 'saying' –in a way that is reminiscent of Austin's *Speech Acts, or How to Do Things with Words?*.

There has often been a debate about how to construe Foucault's relationship to Kant's project in the first *Critique*. As I read him, Foucault was not raising a transcendental question *a la* Kant about the conditions of possibility of knowledge by a subject (endowed with a mind structured by universal concepts and categories) of a given object (experienced in time and space). Instead, I submit that he was taking a more properly historical approach, at least at one level removed from, and therefore from a vantage point external to the framework being interrogated and problematized. He was in effect asking about the conditions of possibility of a given system of knowledge –such as

the one assumed by Kant, among others—in an effort to put in question its pretensions to necessity and universality. If the table below represents schematically the framework assumed by Kant, Foucault was interrogating it from the outside. He was interrogating it from a historical perspective about the form of the framework itself, about each of its assumed components or elements, as well as the relations said, or presumed, to hold between them.



It is for this purpose that Foucault presumably developed an archeological methodology –later developed and extended into a genealogical one. Once again, we might say roughly speaking that the archeological questions have to do with the conditions of possibility of discursive formations, or systems of knowledge in place or assumed to be in place, the rules of their formation and constitution, the conditions under which knowledge-claims are (un)made, certain truth-games are (un)played, etc. The genealogical questions in contrast have to do with the emergence and transformations over time of the system of practices of those who claim to possess or pursue knowledge. Who knows or claims to know and why? For what (specific or general) purposes? To do what? To whom? How is the system of practices always already inscribed within differently calibrated networks or webs of power-relations in various institutions? Etc.

As Foucault often said, the traditional philosophical question about ‘knowledge’ - --about the relation between an individual subject’s mind and a given object in the external world, and typically characterized in terms of useful, adequate, or true representation-- has never been his concern. In other words, one cannot summarize his project under the title of “knowledge and truth” (*savoir et verite*) or “knowledge and the external world” (*connaissance et monde exterieur*). Instead, his concern has been with the *historicity* of knowledge and truth itself –and thus, in showing that we have had different conceptions of knowledge and truth, as well as different conceptions of our relations to the external world, to ourselves, and to others.

Hence, a key point of contention in this regard has always been whether Foucault can actually pull off such a project, and whether it is in fact feasible. From what vantage-point, other than a transcendental one, can Foucault interrogate the systems of knowledge that he is interested in –despite his claims to the contrary?⁴⁶

Through the empirical study of historical “discourses” in different areas of inquiry, Foucault sought to uncover new relationships, displacements, and systemic regularities

⁴⁶ See in this regard the powerfully and astutely argued discussion by Beatrice Han, *Foucault’s Critical Project: between the Transcendental and the Historical* (2002).

that would presumably tell us more about these discourses than their manifest content ever could. “What counts in the things said by men, he writes, is not so much what they might have thought *behind* or *beneath* them, but that which *systematizes* them from the outset.”⁴⁷

Thus, in *Madness and Civilization*, he examines the discourses of psychology and psychiatry in an effort to understand how and why “madness” was ‘problematized’ at a certain period through a number of institutional practices and a certain apparatus of knowledge, and thereby served to define a given profile of ‘normalization.’ He observes that whatever lies outside “the field of the rational,” from one period to another, can only be seen as “madness,” or as “non-sense.”

In the *Birth of the Clinic*, (subtitled “an archeology of the medical gaze”), Foucault sets out to examine medical knowledge in the 18th-19th centuries so as to understand the problematisation of “illness” within the context of certain medical practices and institutions. In so doing, he reveals the dramatic discontinuity that took place, from a quasi-zoological discourse based on the classification of illnesses to one that is more anatomical-clinical and grounded in the observation of damaged tissues.

In *The Order of Things (Les Mots et Les Choses)*,⁴⁸ subtitled “an archeology of the human sciences,” Foucault expands his project and examines the structural transformations which have taken place not just in one but in three different apparently disconnected discourses (in the areas of natural history, political economy, and grammar). It is a way of suggesting somehow that something deeper and with far greater significance had taken place, namely, an epistemic shift (or “paradigm shift” in Kuhn’s terminology) between the “classical” and the properly “modern” period at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. He thereby examines problematisations of *life*, *labor*, and *language* within discursive practices operating according to certain epistemic

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of the Medical Gaze* (1963). (New York; Vintage books, 1994), xv; italics added. This point may be taken as characterizing his properly archeological approach, and rejecting at once both the structuralist and hermeneutical programs as traditionally construed.

⁴⁸ It was deliberately mis-titled in French in order to set a trap to his readers, or to steer their thinking beyond the obvious, paradoxically enough. As Foucault once remarked, his smart readers had noted correctly that his book is not at all about things (*choses*), and the even smarter ones, that it is not either about words (*mots*). One should also add that it is not either about the old Platonist question of traditional Western philosophy concerning the possible relation between words and things (whether it is natural or arbitrary, whether it implies correspondence, adequacy, mirror or truthful representation). Rather, it situates itself outside and somehow prior to, and at an angle from, *words* and *things*. It is about how discourses are fabricated, as specific and autonomous entities, according to different rules of formation, from various (institutional, social, or political) sites, differently in different domains, and at different periods in history for a given society. In other words, it is about how emanating from certain real sites in the real world (*things*), such as sites and institutions, discourses are produced –and more often than not, they will involve words, and they will be about things, but they are not to be taken as being made up only of words or things, or even of their relations. Once humans speak, they do something –in the same way that they do something when they fabricate an object. Discourses in Foucault’s view are fabricated –once they are fabricated, they exist, once they exist, they subsist; and once they subsist, they function; and once they function, they are transformed; and once they are transformed, they have effects; etc. It is this internal consistency of ‘fabricated discourses’ that Foucault studies, seeks to account for and reconstitute for us.

rules. He argues that the rules of formation that give “unity” to any period exist somehow outside the consciousness of those who work within the forms of knowledge of the time. He even goes so far as to declare that such systems not only “evade the consciousness” of individuals, but are all-encompassing and monolithic: “In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice.”⁴⁹

As for the *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), it represents another of Foucault’s monumental effort to articulate explicitly and consciously the methodology that he has been using and putting into play already, albeit implicitly, in all previous works. Because of its reduction of subjectivity to the “surface effects of anonymous discourses” it may be viewed as the most explicitly “structuralist” of his works.⁵⁰ Yet, in a sense that is often overlooked or neglected, it also contains critical elements and insights, albeit tentative and scattered, for going beyond such a program and even putting its limitations into question. As I suggested earlier, it is best to read this part of his *oeuvre* as properly speaking archeological rather than structuralist –though clearly with more affinities with the latter than with the Sartrian existentialist-humanist-philosophy of the subject and human consciousness.

Some authors (e.g., Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983; Han, 2002) have arguably made ‘much to do about nothing’ concerning the fact that Foucault rarely used the term ‘archeology’ after 1970, and never in fact applied the fully articulated and developed formal methodology as it was laid out. They have even argued that it was a failure because, once his *ad hoc* working principles were formulated explicitly, they somehow revealed themselves to be incoherent and flawed. Such a view is, I believe, questionable. Foucault did not abandon a flawed methodology but moved on instead to integrate it into what was to become his next most pressing set of concerns, namely, the social and the political, systems of power/knowledge, and most importantly, “the will to truth” animating them, rather than discourses and systems of knowledge, strictly speaking. In this regard, I agree with the analysis provided by Paras.⁵¹

Soon afterwards, Foucault shifts his focus from systems of discourse/knowledge to systems of power/knowledge.⁵² In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971),⁵³ he lays

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. (New York: Random House, 1970). Translation of *Les Mots et Les Choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 168.

⁵⁰ Paras, 44.

⁵¹ Paras, 10-1; 52-55.

⁵² In a subtle and insightful analysis of the shift in meaning of “the rule or principle of exteriority” from the *Archeology* (1969) to *The Order of Discourse* (1970) and to the final lecture of *The Will to knowledge* (1970-1), Paras argues that one can clearly observe the metamorphosis of Foucault’s thought around 1970, slightly prior to the period discussed here. Such a fine-grained analysis, he claims, supports the view that “there is no conception of the ‘power-knowledge nexus’ here (not yet); there is, instead, the frank subordination of knowledge to a power understood in wholly socio-political terms.” And so he asks: “Why did Foucault begin –suddenly and without precedent –to treat knowledge in a purely functionalist manner as that which serves a social function? Why, to be clear, did he broaden his archeological inquiries to include non-discursive practices, and begin to speak what sounds disturbingly like the Marxist language of ideology?” (2006: 57; my additions in parentheses). This transitional period --during which Foucault is said

out the essentials of a ‘genealogical method’ that seems to displace the ‘archeological approach’ he had previously employed, but which in fact further extends and deepens his previous concerns. Instead of giving priority to the discursive dimension as determinative, Foucault, the practitioner of genealogical history, concentrates on the intertwining of power and knowledge, and most specifically, the effects that different constructions of knowledge have on the bodies of those subjected to institutions such as the hospital, the factory, the prison, or the school.

His focus in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (1976) is the disciplining--the formation and constraining--of the subject by institutions of power and knowledge that include the prison, the asylum, the confessional and the physician’s or psychologist’s practice. In the former, he provides an analysis of the changes in the ‘problematization’ of the relationships between crime/delinquency and punishment within the penal practices and disciplinary institutions of the 18th-19th century. In the latter, he examines the problematization of the relationships between sexuality, discourse, truth and identity within various discursive practices and configurations of power and power relations. In a rather surprising and iconoclastic move, he points out that the nature of the *dispositif sexuel* (“sexual mechanism”) was such that the system it sustained was somehow incessantly articulated in discourse and formulated in terms of “truth” or “truth-games,” and that it cannot be accounted for or explained only in terms of the simplistic, so-called “repressive hypothesis.”

Many commentators have naturally stressed the importance of the shift from archaeology to genealogy, from an examination of *discourses* to a concentration on *power and power-relations*, and one can hardly deny the significant differences between the two approaches and their respective focus or objects of inquiry. But there are nevertheless substantial continuities between the two as well.⁵⁴ For one, Foucault does not abandon the analysis of discourse or knowledge in the later approach; rather, a genealogical analysis explores the workings of institutional power over time through the analysis of discourses, and the complex intersections of the two can often be described as the workings of power/knowledge, or knowledge/power.⁵⁵

to have opted provisionally for a functionalist conception of knowledge-- is explained in part by the social and political concerns and involvements of the time, and in part by his personal and professional affiliations.

⁵³ "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In Paul Rabinow (Ed). *The Foucault Reader*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 76-100. This crucial essay was arguably conceived and written under the friendly influence of Deleuze and his work—as Paras correctly notes and documents (2006: 179).

⁵⁴ On a number of occasions, in the early 80s, Foucault repeated that he was not abandoning one approach in favor of the other but rather shifting and refocusing the object of his analysis and of the ‘problematics’ that has been his concern all along. Was this an expression of ‘philosophical bad faith’ on his part, exemplifying his propensity to reformulate his past work in terms of his present concerns? He was often surprised by commentators’ inclination to see a firm and clear-cut discontinuity in his work (personal communication, Paris, 1983). As I also recall, he made the same point emphatically during the discussion session following one his last lectures at the University of California-Berkeley (later collected and edited by Joseph Pearson as *Fearless Speech*, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(s)/MIT Press, 2001). On this point, Paras is, I believe, right on the mark (2006: 10; 52-4).

⁵⁵ See the very illuminating treatment provided by Joseph Rouse. “Power/Knowledge.” In Gary Gutting (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92-114.

Regimes of knowledge and regimes of power exist both apart from the control or even the consciousness of those who participate in them; their sway is totally effective and unchallenged. The history of their transformations is punctuated by dramatic discontinuities and ruptures that are frequently sudden and nearly complete. No agency, group, identifiable force, or combination of causes directs changes or transformations such as the shift described in *Madness and Civilization* from the practice in the middle ages of allowing the mad to wander from town to town, to the opposite practice beginning in the mid-seventeenth century of restricting their movement by confining them to hospitals and asylums. Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish*, lacking any clear cause is the transformation of punishment from a spectacle of the sovereign power writing on the body of the condemned, to the inculcation of control through the constant discipline of self-observation and self-regulation. Indeed, Foucault grimly observes that attempts to reform a system of excessive punishment may have contributed *not* to a liberating result, as is often surmised, but to the development and imposition of more effective, more internalized means of control.⁵⁶ Foucault indicates however an interest in ethics and resistance to “the micro-logical workings” of disciplinary power as early as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) – a point that is not often acknowledged. But, as it is widely recognized, from that work through the writing of *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Know*, he finds it difficult to locate and specify how one might evade or resist the disciplinary and normalizing forces that both form and constrain the subject.

Besides, his own political engagement and activism in earlier years had made him more acutely aware of the necessity of theorizing ethical and political action in a more hopeful and optimistic way than he had before. But the main challenge for Foucault was precisely how to do that. Once you articulate and elaborate, as he has done, the micro-physics of ‘power’ as a pervasive and ubiquitous phenomenon working through all the arteries and veins as well as the capillaries of the social system and body politic – not confined to a particular apparatus, group, or institution nor equivalent in all of its manifestations, how do you then conceive of ‘resistance’ to such power that is effective, not merely reaction, and nor easily co-opted?⁵⁷

6. The Final Turn to Problematizations, Subjectivation, and Morality

⁵⁶ A development which arguably culminated in what one might call a sophisticated form of “voluntary servitude,” to use La Boetie’s expression, characteristic of so-called *liberal* regimes, i.e., as regimes auto-limiting their coercive powers on the basis of a principle of “objective truth” (presumably owed to their citizens). This could be viewed as part of Foucault’s later critical assessment of liberalism. This is an aspect of Foucault’s work that has not yet the kind of attention it deserves and that is bound to yield some surprising results. Not only with regards to our understanding of liberalism as both a form of political government and economic organization, but perhaps also with regards to the more general question of “how (not) to do political philosophy today.” See note 82.

⁵⁷ See Barry Smart (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*. Vol. I-VII. (London: Routledge, 1994-1995). See also Nader N. Chokr, “Foucault Revisited; On the Analytics of Power,” (2002; unpublished manuscript); Chokr, 2004.

In an interview shortly before his death, published under the title “the Return to Morality,” Foucault makes the following remarkable statement. “By admitting --and I admit it—that I practiced in *The Order of Things*, *Madness and Civilization*, and even in *Discipline and Punish* a philosophical approach based essentially on a certain usage of the philosophical vocabulary, game, and experience and that I gave myself over to it entirely, it is certain that, now, I am trying to distance myself from that form of philosophy. *But it is of course in order to use it as a field of experience to study, structure and organize.* So that this period, which may, in the eyes of some, look like a radical non-philosophy is at the same time *a way of thinking more radically the philosophical experience itself.*”⁵⁸

The interviewer then asked: “It seems that you are now making explicit things that one could only glimpse or read between the lines in your previous works?” Foucault answered promptly: “I must tell you that I don’t see things this way. It seems to me that, [in the works previously mentioned], *many of the things that were implicit could not be made explicit because of the way in which I formulated the problems: that of truth, power, and individual conduct.*”⁵⁹

It should be noted here that Paras also quotes this passage (in his own translation) as a crucial one for validating his overall interpretation. But he does so only selectively and partially, and arguably in a self-serving way. He does not include Foucault’s reply to the interviewer’s follow-up comment.⁶⁰ Yet, it not only reveals an admirable degree of candidness about the necessity he confronted of reformulating the problems, but also (if only implicitly) that though Foucault felt compelled to operate some sort of displacement in his later works, he nevertheless carries through with the results of his previous works – albeit now in a ‘sifted’ manner. Those “implicit things” that one could only glimpse or read between the lines, he now wanted to make explicit.

Besides, even in Foucault’s presumably uncompromising vision of knowledge/power as effecting total control, we may already see elements of opposition and resistance to certain forms of domination and control.⁶¹ The opposition in Foucault’s works to traditional master-narratives such as Marxist historiography, humanist intellectual history, and liberal narratives of progress can be seen as a ‘parodic overturning’ of previous “paradigms” of knowledge. From this point of view, the sudden ruptures, extreme discontinuities, and failures to account for change in Foucault’s histories could also be viewed as having a satiric, and at the same time, a critical effect on established so-called “histories of progress.”⁶² Foucault also makes frequent use of a

⁵⁸ See end part of this essay for a suggestion of what this could mean.

⁵⁹ *Dits et Ecrits* II: 1516; my translation; italics added.

⁶⁰ Paras, 13, 164.

⁶¹ In this context, one may well ask for example about the subject-position (or *standpoint*) from which Foucault himself is able to take his critical (historical-philosophical) stand on modernity. This was by the way a point brought up by the imaginary “hostile interviewer” (standing presumably for Sartre, the philosopher of the irreducibly free subject) in his dramatic questioning of Foucault at the end of the *Archeology of Knowledge*. See previous note to that effect.

⁶² Foucault’s extraordinary ability, as Edward Said once said, to derive apparently limitless conclusions

satiric rhetoric of extremes, or the rhetoric of deliberate exaggeration. Such satiric inversions, one could argue, resemble the parodic skepticism that is often found in the works of other so-called “post-modern thinkers,” who have similarly displayed paranoid-critical visions of history and of controlling systems at some earlier point in their career.

In the later part of Foucault’s career however, the vision of powerful regimes that control and direct history beneath people’s consciousness and beyond their ability to act effectively gives way to an ethics that might through self-discipline somehow evade disciplinary subjectification (*assujettissement*), or, we might say, to a political ethics of local resistance.

In fact, already in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault begins to distance himself from the idea that discursive regimes are monolithic; he argues, for example, against a “totalitarian periodization” according to which at a certain time and in a certain culture, “everyone would think in the same way” (148). Instead, different paradigms of thought and practice can coexist and overlap. Epistemological shifts affect one area of discourse and not others, as well as some groups or individuals and not others (175).⁶³ A space for resistance was therefore already present –albeit in a faint and hesitant way or in dotted lines.

In addition, in his work on *governmentality* in the late 70’s and early 80’s,⁶⁴ Foucault sees not only the growth of disciplinary governance, but also a resistance to governance, “an art of not being governed so much, or in a certain way,” which develops alongside and in resistance to the art of governing.⁶⁵ He pays renewed attention to Enlightenment thinkers as agents of such critique who pursue possibilities for self-governance and self-formation. And most importantly, he calls for the “permanent re-activation of the critical attitude.” He concludes his now famous (1984) paper “What is Enlightenment?” with the following words: “I don’t know whether it must be said today that the critical task still entails faith in Enlightenment; I continue to think that this task requires *work on our limits*, that is, *a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty*.”⁶⁶

In the eight years following the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) perhaps the most significant shift in Foucault’s thought occurs. And it

from some rather limited (French) historical evidence could also be viewed along these lines. Contrast with Paras, 13.

⁶³ In contrast, Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1970), claimed that “a paradigm brooks no rivals” in the context of his discussion of the structure of scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts. Foucault seems to be saying now that many different “paradigms” (or rather *epistemes*) may co-exist or compete, and even proliferate during a certain period. The political implications of either view should be obvious and easy to derive.

⁶⁴ Graham Burchell, et al., (Eds.). *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶⁵ Foucault, “What is Critique?” In *The Politics of Truth*. Eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 28.

⁶⁶ Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (Eds.). “What is Enlightenment?” In *The Essential Foucault. Selections from Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*. (New York: The New Press, 2003), 57; italics added.

occurs not in his published works so far, but, as Paras aptly puts it, in the “laboratory for ideas” that the College de France represented for him. There, he labored and worked out, live, so to speak, his new insights and directions under the mesmerized attention of a captive audience to his lectures-courses, which provided in many instances the raw materials for several of his books.⁶⁷ In Foucault's earlier thought, there does not seem to be clear means of resisting dominant and reigning forms of thought or systems of power.⁶⁸ It is not made clear if it is possible to think outside what is made utterable by the epistemological frameworks of a time, nor is it said plainly that it is actually possible to alter or reform normalizing disciplinary institutions. Yet, in essays and interviews from the mid-70's onward, Foucault argued that there must be ‘sites of resistance’ to power, but the challenge and difficulty was to locate and specify them –and appropriately ‘theorize’ the most effective strategies and tactics.⁶⁹

In order to resolve the crisis that his thought had reached after adding the investigation of modes of power to the analysis of forms of knowledge, Foucault moved arguably into a third phase. This third phase, which did not replace the first two but carried forward the ‘sifted’ results of earlier inquiries, concerned *processes of subjectification* –this time, not in the sense of subject-constitution (*sujet constitue, assujettissement*), but rather in the sense of *subjectivation*, i.e., of self-creation and active subject(ivity)-formation.

It is worth noting here that Deleuze sees, in contrast, a greater distance and discontinuity between the second and third phases of Foucault's thought than between the first two.⁷⁰ He states, for example: “You can say why he passes from knowledge to power, as long as you see that he's not passing from one to the other as from some overall theme to some other theme, but moving from his novel conception of knowledge to an equally inventive new conception of power. This applies still more to the ‘subject’: it takes him *years of silence* to get, in his last books, to this third dimension.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ During a lecture (on January 30) that was part of his course on *The Government of the Living* (1980), Foucault is reported to have made a statement which is, once more, a clear indication of his “continuous recreation” and related “intellectual nomadism.” He said: “For me, theoretical labor doesn’t so much consist of establishing and fixing the set of positions to which I will hold myself, and, in the space between these supposedly coherent positions, forming a system. My problem --or the only possibility of theoretical labor that I see for myself--would be to leave a trace, according the most intelligible design possible, of the movements thanks to which I am no longer where I once was.” Elsewhere during an interview in 1978, he said: “I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and not think the same way as I had before.” (*Dits et Ecrits*, II: 860-914; my translation).

⁶⁸ See Nader N. Chokr, “Mapping out a Shift in Contemporary French Philosophy.” *Yeditepe’ de Felsefe* 1/5: 86-122, August 2006.

⁶⁹ See Chokr, 2004; 2002.

⁷⁰ Paras (2006) may *not* agree with this last point. It is puzzling that Deleuze considers the long period during which Foucault did not publish any major work as one of silence, for he is well-aware that Foucault was talking and talking, or rather lecturing and lecturing, and therefore, moving onward in his thinking and lines of inquiry. Should one assume that a philosopher like Foucault, or Deleuze for matter, is silent and not evolving in his thinking, unless he is publishing major works?

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze. *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. Trans. Martin Joughin. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 92, 105; italics added.

In any case, by 1984, Foucault found it necessary to re-conceive and rewrite the later volumes (II and III) of the *History of Sexuality* so as to update them, so to speak, in light of his most recent thinking and inquiries. They now focused primarily not so much on problems of knowledge and power, but rather on an analysis of how one becomes a subject, of one's relation to oneself, of ethics understood as *an art of shaping one's life*, i.e., as *an aesthetics of existence*.⁷²

Let us at this point recall that two of the lectures-courses that Foucault delivered at the College de France in the 80's were: *The Government of the Living* (1980), and *The Government of the Self and of Others* (1983). The question addressed by the former was surprisingly a very difficult one: "How, in our civilization, do we establish the relations between the government of men and the display of truth in the form of subjectivity, and salvation for all and for each?" According to Paras however, the 1980 lectures were important because they contained a singularly strong indication of the transition under way in Foucault's thinking. For, he claims, they were in fact "about the emergence of a particular (and historically resilient) kind of subjectivity: one that viewed the individual as the *secret bearer of his own truth*."⁷³

As for the 1983 lecture, more precisely, the January 5, 1983 lecture, it constitutes, in Paras' view, "the most striking piece of evidence"⁷⁴ regarding Foucault's enormous shift in his thinking on the subject and subjectivity. "As a single oral presentation, this lecture nevertheless contained, he points out, near complete versions of both 'What is Enlightenment?' and the introduction to the *Use of Pleasure*." In it, Foucault "presented, that is to say, his preface to the study of the aesthetics of existence and his account of the Enlightenment in a single thread." Did Foucault think of the *arts of living* and the *critical ontology of ourselves* as a single issue? Paras claims he did. I would argue further that if he did not see them as a single issue, he certainly sees them as strongly connected in the conception of ethics he seems to favor, as serving to characterize different aspects of the problem that Foucault takes up: How can one assume one's life, and live of a life self-determination and freedom? Can one live according to the arts of living without first undertaking a critical ontology of ourselves? Can any and all individuals, groups or classes afford to live life as if it is a work of art? What are some of the necessary material and social conditions for making such a noble goal attainable? Etc. Presumably a lot hinges on how these questions are answered in terms of the overall account one seeks to provide for Foucault's later work.

⁷² See "The Concern for Truth." Interview with François Ewald. In *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 255-6; "Preface to the *History of Sexuality*, Volume II." In Paul Rabinow (Ed.). *The Foucault Reader*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 336; "The Return of Morality." Interview with Gilles Barbadette and André Scala. In *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (1988), 243.

⁷³ Paras, 111, 113; italics added. Not quite so, I believe. I would say instead that Foucault now viewed the individual as somehow capable of shaping his life to some extent, and thereby validate or verify his experience as 'truthful' in some sense – apart from also being shaped and constituted historically as a subject.

⁷⁴ Paras, 147.

It is not surprising therefore that it is on this basis that Paras goes on to argue that Foucault has in the end returned to a strong and robust sense of subject and subjectivity. One can now say, he claims, that for Foucault, “to be modern is to scrutinize and destabilize our present, so that we might, as ‘free beings,’ craft ourselves in such a way as to transcend it.” And that “Enlightenment” means “*autonomous subjects living their lives as art*.”⁷⁵ In support of his analysis, he quotes Foucault’s characterization of “the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as *work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings*.” In the same argumentative stretch, Paras claims that “Foucault’s last works have generally not been read in this way, despite his determination to make just this point, and that the temptation has been “to read them as if the philosopher still clung to his “strong” genealogical views on power and subjectivity.”⁷⁶

I would here simply make two points: (1) One need not read Foucault as still clinging to “strong” (but to more moderated and tempered) genealogical views. (2) One need not read into his later works a stronger and more robust notion of autonomous and free subject and subjectivity (of the traditional Enlightenment kind or the Sartrean existentialist variety) than can be countenanced by a more consistent (and charitable) interpretation. However, consistently with the latter’s requirements, one could well read into them weaker, partial, or more modest notions of autonomy, subjectivity and critical agency.

In my interpretation of Foucault’s last works, we can at least safely draw the following conclusions. (1) Understanding our present, i.e., how we came to be the way we are, think the way we do, do and say the things we do through what Foucault calls “a critical ontology of ourselves” is a preliminary and necessary propaedeutic for a mode of existence according to the “arts of living.” (2) Effective action no longer occurs only in anonymous, culture-wide discursive and institutional realignments. Besides, (3) Foucault now sees the history of cultural forms as a reservoir of ideas for shaping one’s life, a “treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on that cannot exactly be reactivated” from other societies such as that of the ancient Greeks, but which “can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what’s going on now and to change it.”⁷⁷ As Paul Veyne⁷⁸ (1993) notes quite rightly, Foucault does not argue that an ancient ethos can be resuscitated and inserted unchanged in the modern world; rather, a personal ethos based on a *care for the self* might be one element of an ethical response to the question of the present.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Once again, I don’t think Foucault’s later discussions can support a strong notion of autonomy –of the kind countenanced traditionally by Enlightenment or existentialist thinkers.

⁷⁶ Paras, 146; italics in text.

⁷⁷ “On the Genealogy of the History of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress.” In *Foucault Reader*, (1984), 350.

⁷⁸ Paul Veyne, “The Final Foucault and his Ethics.” (Trans. Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson). *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993): 1-9. He was one of Foucault’s colleagues at the College de France, among those –including Pierre Hadot and Peter Brown -- who reportedly understood his project best, and who were very influential on the later part of his work (Paras, 2006: 101).

⁷⁹ To a naïve reader unfamiliar with the background context of these discussions, this may sound like an ethics of narcissistic concern with one’s self or with one’s narrowly construed selfish interests. But for

Foucault now sees a possibility for maneuvering away from disciplinary constraints of knowledge, power, and subjectification (*assujettissement*) --not by means of opposing or evading an external totalizing force,⁸⁰ but rather through adopting a disciplinary relation to oneself, the self-imposed discipline of an *ethos* or way of life. An individual who pursues such an *art of living*, "ethics as a form to be given to one's behavior and life,"⁸¹ assumes for the same reason responsibility for self-governance, for his own formation and the definition of his subjectivity --now properly understood as the relation of a self to itself. The result however is not a return to the a-historical substantive and possessive subject of liberal humanism,⁸² as Deleuze has argued repeatedly and correctly, I believe, in contrast to Paras and other interpreters.⁸³ Foucault's focus on the processes of subjectification (this time, as *subjectivation* or subject-formation) does not involve a return to the liberal humanist subject. It suggests rather the need for an historically aware process that takes the ethical work-in-progress away from the ends for which social and cultural institutions seek to form certain kinds of subjects --for example, as possessive, self-interested maximizing individuals and indulging consumers.⁸⁴

One who pursues such an ethical self-governance does not do so outside historical, social and cultural determinations. Rather, such a project depends on knowing where we are--how our ways of thinking and our practices have come to be the way they are--so that one can attempt to form oneself in another way --to some extent and yet, in some real sense.⁸⁵ For instance, presumably today, as in the 80's, Foucault would see such awareness as involving a move away from moralities based on systems of codes, principles, rules or regulations for action, and toward a post-Christian and post-Modern ethics, i.e., an *ethics* which, in effect, is an *aesthetics of existence* and whose central question, harking back to Ancient Greek thought, is "How should I *live*?" --how should I

Foucault, who arguably never gives up on the socio-historical constructivist matrix altogether, his later work show that the *self* (even in its relation to itself) is always already defined or constrained by its relations with *others*. See also Part 2, The Cultivation of the Self, and Part 3, Self and Others of *The Care for the Self*. See also forthcoming discussion to that effect.

⁸⁰ Such an option, it must be said, has never really been a viable one --except perhaps for the most naively primitivist anarchists or the most hardened, idealistic and utopian, revolutionaries of yesteryears.

⁸¹ "Concern for Truth," 263.

⁸² See Alessandro Pizzorno. "Foucault and the Liberal View of the Individual." In Timothy Armstrong (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 204-211 --for an attempt at articulating Foucault's position in this regard along the lines assumed or taken herein .

⁸³ Compare and contrast for example with Luc Ferry and Alain Renault (1985/1990); Peter Dews, "The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault." *Radical Philosophy* 51 (Spring 1989): 37-41. Reprinted in Barry Smart (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*. vol. VI. (London: Routledge, 1994), 148-156; and Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*. (London: Sage Publications), 2005.

⁸⁴ Gilles Deleuze (1995: 95; 106; 115; 118). See also his *Foucault*. Trans. Sean Hand. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

⁸⁵ For a somewhat different take on the notion of "technologies and cultivation of the self," see Pierre Hadot "Reflections on the Notion of 'Cultivation of the Self'." In Timothy Armstrong (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 225-232. See also his *Philosophy as Way of Life*. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995) --despite Foucault's claims to have been influenced by Hadot's work.

relate to myself and others, rather than “How should I *act*?” –according to which rules, regulations, codes or principles.⁸⁶

To the charges of *elitism* or *political quietism* sometimes made against Foucault’s view, one could reply as follows. By resisting the temptation of utopian politics and universal moral prescription, Foucault did not imply “that one may as well leave people in the slums thinking that they can simply exercise their rights there.”⁸⁷ He insisted instead that “showing how social mechanisms...have been able to work, how forms of repression and constraint have acted, and then starting from here...one [leaves]...to the people themselves, knowing all the above, the frontier possibility of self-determination.”⁸⁸ But what exactly did Foucault mean by this “possibility of self-determination”? How precisely should we understand and conceive the relation between constraint and self-determination –beyond simply deprecating the former and naively celebrating the latter? The question about the basic conditions under which a project of self-determination can be attempted in a meaningful sense has been largely absent from the work of contemporary commentators on Foucault’s political thought.

My suggestion in this regard is to explore creative ways to bring together Foucault (e.g., his discussion of ‘limit experience’ and ‘capabilities’)⁸⁹ and the “capabilities approach” of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The idea is that the latter approach could provide the necessary bridge or link between the “critical ontology of ourselves” and the “arts of living” ethical perspective, by focusing on the social and material conditions that would be necessary for social justice. Its main effort would consist in expanding the capabilities set of each and all individuals –that is to say, by giving them greater degree of choice about the capabilities (understood here as “valuable beings and doings”) that they wish or not to actualize (into functionings) for themselves in accord with their conception of the good life. When the problem of self-determination and freedom is thus considered through the prism of the “capabilities approach” and in this light, a more complex, yet also less elitist and more realistic picture of Foucault’s political approach emerges, it seems. For now, I would only venture to submit that it is bound to have some potentially exciting implications for questions of social policy and human development.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ “An Aesthetics of Existence.” Interview with Alessandro Fontana. In *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 1988: 49-50. See also Rabinow, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” (1994: 253-280); “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as Practice of Freedom,” (1994: 281-301) for illuminating interviews about Foucault’s philosophical odyssey, and most specifically, about the process by which he arrived at the notion of “an ethics as aesthetics of existence.” See also the more critical analyses provided in this regard by Rainer Rochlitz, “The Aesthetics of Existence: Post-conventional Morality and the Theory of Power in Michel Foucault.” In Timothy Armstrong (Ed.). *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 248-259; Christian Bouchindhomme, “Foucault, Morality and Criticism.” In Timothy Armstrong. Ed. *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 317-327.

⁸⁷ Cited in J. Bennett, “How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?” Foucault, Schiller and the Aestheticization of Ethics.” *Political Theory* 24/4: 653-72, 660.

⁸⁸ Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence.” In S. Lotringer (Ed.) *Foucault Live*. New York: Semiotext(e), p. 452.

⁸⁹ In the famous paper, “What is Enlightenment?” (1984).

⁹⁰ This is one aspect of the research program that currently interests me, and that I intend to pursue further,

7. On the Ethics of the Concern for the Self as Practice of Freedom—Toward a New Reading and Interpretation, or Foucault 2.1

Foucault's work did not consist so much in analyzing *facts* (i.e., material things, institutions or practices) or *interpretations* (i.e., ideas, thoughts, theories, discourses) as it did in always determining and ascertaining their actual or possible relations in different domains, in reference to different subjects (in the double sense of the term) without ever seeking to be reductive in either direction. In so doing, he sought to reject all commonly established or accepted ontologies, unities, disciplinary or institutional boundaries, thematics, as well as theoretical and methodological assumptions. Instead, as he puts it, he was interested in analyzing anew and in a fresh manner "the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought –and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed." And he adds: "The archeological dimension of the analysis made it possible to examine the forms themselves; its genealogical dimension enable me to analyze their formation out of the practices and the modifications undergone by the latter. There was the problematization of madness and illness arising out of social and medical practices, and defining a certain pattern of "normalization"; a problematization of life, language, and labor in discursive practices that conformed to certain "epistemic" rules' and a problematique of crime and criminal behavior emerging from certain punitive practices conforming to a "disciplinary" model. And now (meaning in Vol. II and III of *The History of Sexuality*), I would like to show how, in classical antiquity, sexual activity and sexual pleasures, were problematized through practices of the self, bringing into play the criteria of an "aesthetics of existence."⁹¹

It is this last focus which has led him, as he explains, to reorient his entire study on "the genealogy of desiring man," from classical antiquity through the first centuries of Christianity."⁹² Because it seemed clear to Foucault that "one could not very well analyze the formation and development of the experience of sexuality from the eighteenth century onward, without doing a historical and critical study dealing with desire and the desiring subject. In other words, without undertaking a '*genealogy*'." "In order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of a sexuality, it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself a *subject* of desire."⁹³ Foucault became therefore interested in analyzing "the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire,

in another context, namely, the possibly fruitful exchanges between Foucault's view on freedom and ethics and the "capabilities approach" of Sen and Nussbaum. So far, I know only of one groundbreaking study that has taken up this area of investigation: Saul Tobias, "Foucault on Freedom and Capabilities." *Theory, Culture & Society* 22/4: 65-85.

⁹¹ UP, pp. 11, 11-12.

⁹² UP, p. 12.

⁹³ UP, pp. 5-6; italics added.

bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the *truth* of their *being*, be it natural or fallen.”⁹⁴

Looking back on his various historico-philosophical studies, Foucault views them as the “record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again.” It was, he says, “a philosophical exercise” (an ‘*ascesis*’), whose “object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.”⁹⁵

In the end, I believe that Foucault was not always well understood in his effort to convey and defend the following points –very much against the grain and current of much of contemporary philosophy. (1) The *historicity of truth* is nevertheless compatible with its so-called ‘*objectivity*,’ and as such, it does not pose an intractable problem, nor does it issue necessarily into a radical form of skepticism, as most readers and commentators have tended to believe. (2) The *subject* is *historically constituted*, and yet, the subject can also be foundational, and therefore capable of “freedom” now understood as “practice of the self on the self,” and of being self-constituting as a critical and reflective moral agent, whose “ethics” is best viewed as “an aesthetics of existence.”

Foucault’s attitude and approach toward ‘truth’ has been, I believe, profoundly misunderstood. We all acted for the most part as if his archeological-genealogical work was the fruit of a profound skepticism about the truth. In fact, for Foucault, ‘truth’ is the effect produced by the discourses through which human beings or subjects represent for themselves their experience of the real world. And this, of course, always *through* or *in* history. But in such a way that such experience is “verified,” in other words, fabricates its own authenticity, its own “truth.” This in effect presupposes that these subjects actively think through, and ‘problematize’ the “truth” of their experience. They could thus ‘problematize’ it in different domains or spaces –for example, in that of madness and reason, of the description and analysis of bodies, or of morality.

For Foucault, it was always a matter of showing how “a lived universe” become true for the subjects experiencing or living (in) it, at a given period in history. And in so doing, it was a matter of showing that there is not an insoluble conflict between the existence of ‘objective truth’ and its historicity. At the same time, I believe that Foucault wanted to show in the final analysis that there is no fundamental difference between *the history of morality* and *the history of the other problems*, which were previously of interest to him. He did so, I would argue, by insisting on the one hand on the historicity of truth, and on the other hand, on the irrefutable presence of a desire, will, effort (perhaps irrepressible) to seek or tell the truth (a sort of “will to truth”) in the existence of subjects historically situated and constituted.

As suggested earlier, on a number of occasions, there is, however, something relatively new in Foucault’s later works. This novelty, which undoubtedly modulate the leading thread of his life-long line of inquiry, has to do with the concepts of

⁹⁴ UP, p. 5; italics added.

⁹⁵ UP, p. 9.

“*problematization*” and “*subjectivation*.” Let us consider once again, but from a slightly different perspective, in what senses they add something new to our understanding of Foucault’s later works.

Traditionally, morality is often conceived of in terms of interdictions—lists of do’s and don’ts determined according to various rules, regulations, codes, or principles. Systems of morality are typically imposed from the outside, as it were, upon the life of subjects, and invariably from the point of view of institutions, beliefs, or prejudices. Their goal is to inhibit and repress desires, as well as playful and otherwise pleasurable activities. In such a conception, morality and desire are radically at odds, with the former on the side of interdictions and the forbidden, and the latter on the side of (more or less avowed) transgressions of interdictions and the forbidden. The subject is thus considered to be on the side of the naturally expanding force of desire, and the institutions (austere and severe) are said to be on the side of interdictions and the forbidden.

For Foucault, the birth or emergence of the “subject as subject” --in the period of ancient classical Greece, Imperial Rome and the first centuries of Christianity-- cannot be understood, nor accounted for, in terms of a simple conflictual, antagonistic game pitting it against the institutions, and in which its *raison d’être* is to transgress and overcome interdictions and the forbidden. I submit that Foucault would reject the view of the subject underwriting such a conception, namely, one according to which there is somehow a sort of “good ‘subject’” of desire, whose reason to be is to resist the institutions’ effort at moralizing and normalizing him.

By studying the ways in which the “intellectuals” of that period (i.e., physicians, moralists, and philosophers) problematized their existence --that is, transformed it into a problem, a question to discuss, debate, and eventually resolve into something to which a form or shape must be given. And who, more specifically, problematized their desires (e.g., by considering various ways to indulge (or not) in them and find some satisfaction, or to avoid excesses and perils, etc), Foucault shows that they have developed “systems of morality,” or rather, “an ethical vision of their subjective life” which is also and at once “a theory of freedom.” In effect, he shows us how the ‘subject’ dates his own birth on the basis of (1) a problematization of his experience of desire, and even of his corporeal and sexual experience, and (2) a moral analysis and regulation of that experience carried out through a number of systems of thought.

As I pointed earlier, the notion of “experience that we find in Foucault’s later works takes on an added layer of meaning, which is helpful indeed in understanding Foucault’s thought. It is no longer the romantic figure of the Other, that we find in his early works. It becomes instead the figure of ‘problematization’ itself. How, a given living matter, that of desires and the need to create forms, can be thought, lived, disciplined, and dominated, without this time however being totally determined and oppressed. The constitution of the self or subject (which has, once again, nothing to do with the traditional philosophical problem of self-awareness or self-consciousness) becomes real through real practices of *austerity* as well as practices of *freedom*. To put it succinctly:

[Austerity + Freedom → Subject].

The subject does of course exist, but it has a double reality. Culture presupposes a figure of the subject –which is often the ideal of certain privileged classes. But, as I pointed earlier, the subject is both historical and at the same time, foundational. The subject is constituted historically on the basis of various practices, technologies, and doctrines (moral, medical and philosophical). Yet, the subject is also foundational, in the sense of being the founder and initiator of judgments and behaviors, which condition the life of those who act upon the injunction to undertake an *ascesis*, a work (on themselves) of subjectivation.

It should be obvious by now that Foucault's view departs radically from the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, as well as from the Kantian perspective. Let me explain briefly in what sense it differs from the latter –leaving for now aside the former which can easily be gleaned from the discussion above.

As we know, for Kant, there is independently of any historical conditions a moral imperative, and that, is the categorical imperative, according to which a rational and therefore moral person should always will that the maxim of his action be universalizable –without contradictions. Freedom, under such a conception, is the effect in a subjective life of the discovery of the moral law within, and that a subject imposes upon himself. The moral law enlightens the subject who discover (in) himself (to be) an unconditioned consciousness (a noumenal being) capable of acting in the world independently of the conditions and circumstances which could otherwise affect and determine his phenomenal being.

In contrast, for Foucault, freedom is to be discovered in the relation that a given subject has with himself, and must be won over and over, it would seem, through an on-going practice. However, it is also important to recall that 'freedom' itself is historical. There is even a history of the forms and figures of freedom. Christian freedom was certainly different from the conception just discussed –as it was conceived as the result of a liberation from sin, through "the techniques of confession." Freed from sin, individuals are free. This clearly implied an entirely different relation to the body and to truth itself. Whereas for the Ancients, freedom, for which, it must be said, Foucault seems to have both a sort of admiration and an ironic distance, is conceived of, as *work* or *practice*. "Work of self on oneself," to be sure. This is radically different from the Kantian view, where it is the result of the application of a law, or the imposition upon myself of the moral law.

For the Ancients, as Foucault sees it, the individual has the opportunity to shape himself, to give himself a form –one that is all the more beautiful and graceful that it has been worked and worked over, and refined further. Freedom therefore becomes a power that is exercised over oneself, before it can be properly and justly exercised over others (see *The Care of the Self*, Part Two and Three). There may be here another insight about 'power'. Not only is it essentially neither good nor bad (*History of Sexuality*, Vol. I), but it can only be exercised on others in this kind of culture when it has first been exercised

over oneself (*History of Sexuality*, Vol. II and III). This is by the way the view of the Stoic philosopher, Mark Aurelius, but it is shared by many other Ancients. In opposition to Kant, for Foucault, there does seem to be a profound identity between the *subject of knowledge* and the *subject of morality*. The more one knows oneself, the more one works on oneself, the more one struggles against oneself (one's desires and their potentially violent and destructive excesses), the more one is free and therefore moral.

It is thus by examining the forms and modalities of the relation of self to self in ancient times that Foucault was able to arrive at "the figure of the subject" –who is the founder of an experience of truth while being at the time subjected to the variations of history. The 'subject' and 'truth' are taken to be mutually defining, necessary to experience, and at the same time destined to disappear into the 'black hole' or 'dustbin' of history.⁹⁶

8. A Modest Proposal—For a Possible Extension of Foucault's View on Ethics

The re-formulation of the central question of ethics, inspired by Ancient Greek thought, that Foucault envisages could, one might argue, serve to expand the scope of ethics beyond the modern conception, both vertically and horizontally.

First, it could expand the scope of ethics vertically, in that it would not specify whether the living 'thing' is a person, a community, an animal, a machine, the whole human species, or indeed the entire biosphere. So understood, ethics could be expanded upward and would incorporate not only ethics in the traditional sense, but social and political philosophy as well. It would then comprise some general guidelines and recommendations by which life could and should be navigated, and in particular, how individuals and communities could or should make or find their way through the world, in order to "be at home in the world" (James), or, to paraphrase Heidegger, "dwell poetically in the world."

Second, it could expand ethics horizontally, in that by not asking how should I act but rather how should I live, it would move its range of concern beyond the narrower sphere of action altogether. Under such an expansion, the exchanges between the different levels identified earlier –individuals, community, society, species, and biosphere—would be ethically far more significant than what happens on any one level. But these kinds of exchanges take place presumably on "the edge of ethics" as traditionally conceived, and are arguably best understood in terms of different kinds of "*poetic interactions*"⁹⁷ –involving diversely creative "*ways of worldmaking*" (Goodman). In the apt words of McCumber, we could then say that "the edge of ethics is the place where *nature*, *society* and *community* guide me, even as I seek to transform them. It is the place where I have to respect things and people, instead of act(ing) *on* or *with* them –i.e.,

⁹⁶ More on this point in the closing sections of this essay.

⁹⁷ For details see John McCumber, *Poetic Interaction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Obviously this expression is here used in a technical sense –literally or etymologically, as in Heidegger's work, in the Greek sense of 'poetry' as '*poeisis*' (making or creating new forms).

where I must *situate* myself with respect to them.”⁹⁸ In order to act ethically, we must then have defined and understood the situation we are in.⁹⁹ The crucial point commonly left out by traditional action-oriented ethics is that defining and understanding our situation is itself also an ethical undertaking –perhaps even one that is logically and ontologically prior. The aspect of ethical ‘behavior’ that consists in “situating us among concrete historical circumstances” is perhaps best viewed as *responding* to people and things rather merely as *acting on* them: it is in other words the place where my active freedom comes to its own edge. Along this line of thinking, we have, I believe, some of the necessary elements for a bold and imaginative articulation of a transformative philosophy, i.e., an ecologically-oriented ethics and bio-politics.¹⁰⁰

If at “the edge of ethics,” individual actions are channeled by various kinds of relationships which may harden into different (social, cultural economic, and political) institutions, then the following question does naturally arise. What are the kinds of institutions which can best serve the purpose of governing (ourselves, others, the living, our relationships --to ourselves, each other, others, the living/the non-living, etc) at all relevant levels? This is properly speaking in Foucault’s terminology the question of *governmentality* –albeit admittedly in some expanded sense. In his effort (starting in 1979) to study not so much the actual practice of government, but rather how government self-consciously reflected on the best way of governing, he coined the term of ‘bio-politics.’¹⁰¹

In this context, he observed to the surprise and dismay of many that ‘liberalism’ is perhaps most distinctively the political-economic doctrine that introduced the question of “auto-limitation by the principle of ‘objective’ truth” into the “limitless presumption of the police state.” This was also the time when his model of power and of the individual subject started noticeably to undergo some significant transformation. In a nutshell, the individual was no longer seen as the pure product of pervasive and invasive mechanisms of power/knowledge, and appears instead to be the complex result of a (dialectical) interaction between external *techniques of coercion* and *techniques of the self*.¹⁰² The mechanisms of power and domination (states, schools, factories, prisons, asylums, hospitals, etc) were no longer themselves viewed as relentless and ruthless agents of continuous and invasive observation and control, but as chastened, or more or less

⁹⁸ John McCumber, *Reshaping Reason: Toward a New Philosophy*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 164; italics added.

⁹⁹ This is clearly a view that Foucault shares and defends, given his ever-pressing concern with the present even when he is looking back in time at how our ways of thinking and doing things have been constituted and come to be what they are today. "What Our Present Is." Interview with André Berten. In *The Politics of Truth*, (1997): 147-68.

¹⁰⁰ For further details, see Nader N. Chokr. “Philosophy in Time, or How to Inhabit Time? A Critique of Temporal Reason –A critical review of John McCumber. *Reshaping Reason: Toward a New Philosophy*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005.” In *Philosophy in Review / Comptes Rendus Philosophiques* 26/3, June 2006.

¹⁰¹ Compare and contrast with Paras, 12-3.

¹⁰² See “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” 1994; see also *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Edited by Luther H. Martin et al., (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 9-15; 16-49; 145-162.

restrained, managers and overseers regulating their territory and population, in part at least, on the basis of accumulated 'objective knowledge.' To the extent that the individual subject was no longer 'determined' but 'partially self-constituting,' he could therefore live his life not merely as governed but as self-governing, or in any case, as capable of having a say about how (much) he wished (or not) to be governed –in this or that way. He could therefore opt to live a life according to an "etho-poetic," (UP, p. 13) or an aesthetically-oriented ethics," as Foucault would probably prefer to say --or alternatively, according to what I would call "an ecologically-oriented ethics."

Perhaps the closest model for the kind of ethical action that Foucault calls for can be found in the project that Nietzsche ascribes to "we knowers," the "good Europeans," characterized at the conclusion of *The Genealogy of Morality* as "heirs of Europe's longest and bravest self-overcoming."¹⁰³ Christian belief having been overcome by a morality grounded in "the will to truth,"¹⁰⁴ the latter must overcome itself in a new ethos which will paradoxically be an outgrowth of, and stand in opposition to "the will to truth." Similarly, Foucault sees the forces of disciplinary society and the ensuing society of control (to use Deleuze's term) being countered by an ethos that is a form of disciplinarity and control yet also works in opposition to it. Such an ethos of self-governance and self-control is based neither on "the will to truth" nor on the "regulative morality" tied to it, but it could possibly be inspired by an individual's appropriation of something like the *arts of living*, for example.

9. Closing Remarks

In closing, we can therefore observe both continuities and discontinuities between Foucault's earlier investigations of regimes of discourse/knowledge/truth-games and power/knowledge, and his later focus on critical, self-constituting subjects, and therefore on subjectivation and ethics. His later discussions point unquestionably to the possibility of a political ethics that is not identical with, but may be compared to *an ethics of self-discipline*. Local ethical action may not proceed as far as Foucault would want in dismantling the humanist subject, but by challenging rather than embracing the oppressive systems of the time, neither denying their responsibility nor exaggerating their effectiveness.

It is, I believe, in this context (*pace* Paras)¹⁰⁵ that we must understand his statement –which seems to play a central role in Paras' over-arching defense of his interpretation: "Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a

¹⁰³ F. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen. New Edition. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 116-7.

¹⁰⁴ Beatrice Han (2002) argues quite rightly and convincingly about the significance of this Nietzschean importation into Foucault's entire work, and in a related way, about the importance of Nietzsche for understanding Foucault's whole philosophical outlook. See also Alan Sheridan for his work by this title, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*. London: Tavistock, 1981. (1981). Paras concurs with such an analysis (2006: 54).

¹⁰⁵ Paras, 14, 147ff.

problem.”¹⁰⁶ What we can do is to ‘problematize,’ and we can do so only from the vantage-point of differently situated subject-positions and differently self-constituted subjects. Neutrality is not an option. Our task is to define the conditions under which we can ‘problematize’ and ‘re-problematize,’ as need be, what we are and what we do in the world in which we live.

Thus, Foucault's work moves from an earlier vision of structured discourses and regimes of discipline and power that precludes anything like autonomy, choice and even change to a vision of a self-disciplined subject with some *limited* yet more *effective* ethico-political agency and resistance. Although Foucault ascribe to agents in his late work an ability to distance themselves critically from their historical present, such a limited critical agency does not derive from a return to a humanist, or even purely human, individual subject. Others philosophers, such as Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, were committed to recuperating the traditional, autonomous, liberal, individual subject. But Foucault, arguably interested in the opposite of such a return, should be read instead as investigating the process of subjectivation (now, in its double, equivocal or ambiguous, meaning). That is, as both possible subject-formations and subject-positions, and proposing ways in which people can participate to some extent in *re-creating themselves* as locally situated ethical and political agents –who are furthermore perhaps better apprehended as already situated in a post-humanist and post-postmodern era.¹⁰⁷

Though I believe that Foucault in the end does indeed thwart “the fulfillment of nihilism,” to use Paul Veyne’s expression, his ethico-political stance cannot be equated however with that of a radiant optimist. Instead, it is best viewed, to paraphrase his own words, as one of exacerbated pessimism, because in-formed by a sober dose of realism, which yet remains somewhat hopeful by desperately calling for, and issuing into, a form of moral and political hyper-activism.

If there is one single theme that runs throughout Foucault’s entire corpus, it is this. The role of philosophy is not to reassure us by showing us a whole set of forms and figures which are, so to speak, “synonymous with us,” in such a way that we could think that our way of life, that our current conception of ‘freedom’ for example —is some sort of eternal form. On the contrary, it is to show us not only the passage of successive forms and figures, but also the way in which human beings never stop inventing and creating new forms by “unlearning” (*se deprendre*), i.e., by taking our distances from, rejecting, and completely abandoning certain forms and figures. The term of “*se deprendre*” (translated here for lack of a better word as “*unlearning*”) is here obviously much stronger than what is usually conveyed by the term “*critique*” or any of its derivatives.

Strong and positive forms do not deny each other, instead, they succeed each other. They appear, they triumph or perish, they disappear, and others appear and disappear, and so on. For example, The Christian revolution did not only criticize Stoicism and its ethics. It created something so powerful that the previously dominant

¹⁰⁶ In *Polemic, Politics and Problematics*, 1984, p.388.

¹⁰⁷ See Chokr, 2006.

form or figure is erased and disappears –almost without traces. Similarly, one could say the Modern revolution swept aside into the ‘black hole of history’ the Middle Ages. Just as, quite likely, the post-Modern revolution is already sweeping aside the Modern era and its ethics. This kind of game of successive appearances (emergences or eruptions) and disappearances (effacements or displacements) constitutes, in Foucault’s view, both the jubilation and the ethical importance of philosophy. If philosophy can be of any help (at all) from an ethical point of view, it is by teaching us how to bear and endure these appearances and disappearances of the “figures of truth.”

We should therefore read Foucault today as the philosopher who has taken it upon himself to accomplish the following two most general tasks. (1) To make visible and show us various successive forms and figures of Ourselves, with some that are noble and praiseworthy and others, ignoble and morally dubious, as well as forms and figures of Others –i.e., other than ourselves. (2) To teach us how to confront and endure the discontinuous, that which is the *abyss* of / in *history*, and which appears, perhaps most disturbingly, in the always-new always already opening up before us. This is, I believe, the point that Foucault wanted to make at the end of *The Order of Things*, when he wagered that “man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387).

If it is true that ‘man’ was born at the end of the 18th century, and if it is true that ‘man’ is a figure drawn inside our system of knowledge, then we must expect that such a figure will soon be erased and disappear. In any case, says Foucault, the *honest man* (i.e., the man with some intellectual integrity) today must somehow know that the figure of ‘man’ is fragile, and likely to go by the way side, as all forms and figures are destined to do, and as all previous ones have done before. To be sure, this “duty of honesty” does not present itself for the first time either. The question posed itself in the 16th century (with Copernicus), and in the 17th century (with Descartes). Then the question was to determine the kind of *cosmos* or *nature* within which the figure of ‘man’ was to be apprehended and situated. In the same way, the question before us today is to determine the “system of knowledge” within which ‘man’ figures and is constructed. And our duty of honesty requires that we submit ourselves somehow to “a new order of things,” a new regime of being and doing” that literally overwhelms us in every way and surpasses us –and in which, obviously, man’ is not the starting and end-point of all our endeavors.

As we well know, most of the moral theories which have dominated the Western philosophical landscape since the 19th century consist in efforts seeking to demonstrate that the *essence*, *truth*, or *nature of man* is in some sense *the secret* to discover and the *ultimate truth* to liberate. All of our values have since been *humanist* values. But let us not forget that the term “humanism” itself was coined only in the 19th century. And so, in effect, humanism is a recent thematic. And yet, in such a relatively short period, it came to shape and determine much of contemporary thought. For example, Marxism, initially formulated as a reflection in political economy, is quickly altered and alienated within a humanism. Christianity, intended as a religion, is also quickly altered and turned into a humanism. Similarly, the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger were also turned into humanism by the French variety of existentialism. Humanism is, for Foucault, the great perversion of all of our knowledge (*savoir et connaissance*) and of all contemporary

experiences. We must therefore seek to overcome it –just as it was necessary in the 16th century to overcome medieval thought. In the Modern era, humanism represents our Middle Age. As a form and figure, it too is destined to be erased and disappear. Apparently eternal forms and figures are not in fact eternal. This theme is unquestionably the thread that ties together Foucault's entire corpus from the beginning to the end.